

Homer, Iliad, Book I

Sing, goddess, of the rage of Achilles, Peleus' son;  
rage that brought innumerable troubles to the Achaeans,  
sending many warriors down to Hades as dead shadows,  
their bodies abandoned as prey for dogs and birds to feed on.

Such was the will of Zeus to be. Goddess, sing the beginning :  
the quarrel that separated the son of Atreus, king of men,  
and δῖος Achilles. Which of the gods made these two powers  
stand in challenge?—Apollo, the one son of Leto and Zeus.

Now one day the priest they call Chryses came to the well-built ships  
of the Achaeans. He hoped to free his daughter from the hand  
of Agamemnon (which brought great dishonour to all concerned).  
He brought with him a magnificent wealth of riches, and held  
in hand a sign that showed his deference, for he had wrapped round  
his golden staff the laurel crown he'd taken from his bowed head.  
So down in his hands he held the leaves of the far-shooting god,  
lowered to show his suppliance. He begged the Achaean men,  
particularly the commanders of the people, the two  
sons of Atreus :

"Sons of Atreus," he prayed, "and all you strong-armoured Achaeans,  
may the Olympians allow you to flatten Priam's city,  
and return home safe and well! Only release my beloved  
daughter to me! Accept this ransom, in holy fear of the son  
of God, far-shooting Apollo."

And all the Achaeans in thunderous unity shouted,  
and assented with applause; for the army of warriors

reverenced the priest; and the glorious ransom appealed to them.  
But Agamemnon remained unconvinced, and dismissed the priest  
roughly, and delivered a dreadful word :

“Old man, let me not find you here by the ships ever again.  
If you come, you’ll see how little power that leafy staff has.  
The girl is mine. She shall live in my house in Argos and work  
the loom, and warm my bed, until only old age sets her free.  
Away out of my sight! I will not be provoked to anger.  
I allow you to leave with your life.”

So what happened was, Apollo sent foul pestilence throughout  
the army, and men began dying.

And this is how that came to be :

Sad at heart, old man Chryses, fearing Agamemnon’s power  
and sway, departed from his audience without a word, and  
now walked along the sands by the sea, hearing the constant crash  
of the waves that moved eternal; and he prayed to Apollo  
Rescuer, whom resplendently-spirited Leto had brought to be.

“Hear me!” he spoke out into the air, “Apollo of the bow  
that shines with silver glints, which flash as far as Island Cryse  
off to the west, and to Cilla, city away in the east.

In those places, and in island Tenedos between, you rule  
strong; but now your hand, not only heart, is required to rule!  
Hear me, Apollo σμίνθος ! You who destroy the mice that gnaw  
at the bow-strings in the night, and the berries in the vineyard.  
If ever I have crowned your temple with graceful accomplishment,  
and sent you the scent of savoury thigh-pieces I burned for

your pleasure, bulls and goats and sheep, then hear this I pray to you :  
 let each tear I drop be an arrow you fly, and bring them down,  
 all those Danaans, to death.”

This, then, the old man prayed; and Φοῖβος Apollo obliged him.  
 Coming down from the summits of Olympus, incensed at heart,  
 his shoulders carrying his silver bow and quiver stuffed full  
 of arrows, all which rattled, a deadly noise, as he came on,  
 Apollo’s coming was like the night. Apart a great distance  
 from the black ships, he let an arrow fly : and the bow-string’s voice  
 sang a silvery sound. He hit the mules first, and the watchdogs,  
 then sent death flying into the men, piercing them constantly.

And so after this many funeral fires burned for now.  
 For nine mortal days the god showered them with death-tipped arrows;  
 and on the tenth the army took action. For slim-armed Hera,  
 frowning at all this needless death, nudged Achilles to call them  
 to assembly. So when the army assembled, the wisest  
 of them, then quick-footed Achilles spoke :

“Son of Atreus, king of men, should we not now sail out of here?  
 It’s plain we’re being beaten back with progress. Sail away,  
 that is, if any of us outruns the disease that drops us  
 to dust as quickly as the war persists in doing! These threats  
 urge our quick departure, all the Achaeans, back to our homes.

But come now! Let us ask a prophet, or whoever he be  
 who sees truth in dreams (and in that way sees, distinctly, deep Zeus,  
 for all dreams He brings to us), and let him tell us why Φοῖβος  
 Apollo is so upset with us. Might he be disgusted  
 with arrogance? Or might our many offerings of sacrifice

be wrong somehow, so that the rising steam and scent to Heaven  
of lambs and goats makes him grimace? If you sacrifice rightly,  
perhaps he'll receive our gifts gladly, and cure the pestilence."

So spoke Achilles, then he sat back down.

Calchas, son of Thestor, now stood before the assembly.  
Of all seers he best read the meanings in expressive flights  
of birds; he best knew the truth of all that "was", "is", and "will be".  
His divinations had guided the Achaean ships to Troy,  
and such faculty for prophesy was a gift from none other  
than Φοῖβος Apollo himself.

Now Calchas addressed the assembly in all earnesty :

"Achilles, whom Zeus Orderer clearly favours, you wish me  
to appraise the genius of him who hits all marks regardless  
of distance, and want revealed a reason for his present rage.  
But this task you encourage I fear will bring me much trouble.  
So first hear these words : you must swear an oath that no harm will come  
to me, and only then will I speak. For I am sure my words  
will anger a man who stands here, one whom Achaeans obey.  
He may hold his rage inside for now, but afterwards boil,  
until finally he runs his hands onto me. Tell me, then,  
if you will consider protecting my life, if I speak."

And brilliant Achilles answered him :

"Be strong," he said, "and speak of what you see within. Apollo,  
beloved of Zeus, whose presence you reveal in your prayers  
to the Danaans, has gifted you this power, and we must hear.

And not a one of us shall lay a heavy hand on you, no,  
 not a single Danaan in camp by the ships, not even  
 if a Danaan you name is Agamemnon (who believes  
 himself to be the best of us, and speaks this, so we hear him.)”

Emboldened by such fighting words, the blameless seer spoke out :

“It is the propriety of neither prayer nor sacrifice  
 that insults him : these we do well. It is the priest  
 Agamemnon shames, and in double accounting :  
 neither will he release his grip on her, nor will  
 he allow delivery of the ransom. This is the cause  
 for the pestilence of arrows, from he who aims  
 from far and does not miss. So, until we give back  
 the girl to the father—and neither a payment  
 for the girl nor the transaction of a ransom  
 is applicable now—the god will not push back  
 the disease from the army. The tender-eyed girl  
 must be led before a hecatomb to the city  
 of Chryse. Only then might we propitiate Apollo.”

Thus, having spoken, the prophet sat back down.

And Agamemnon rose to his feet, Atreus’ son,  
 ruler of the far and wide : and just now greatly  
 irritated. His whole spirit had gone full-dark  
 with breathing fury, and his eyes flashed fire.  
 The look he put into the prophet was frightful.

And he said :

“You miserable little puzzler of signs!  
 Not a single encouraging prophesy has passed  
 through your lips, only evil from out of your heart.  
 Which of your prayers have brought us any healing?  
 And now you speak before us all and say a vision  
 tells you I am the reason for the pestilence?  
 (Yet the far-shooter finds it unacceptable  
 to point his aim at me, and strike me with disease?)  
 And you say we must tolerate these woes because  
 of a girl I choose to keep in my house?  
 And paying or nor paying a ransom is part  
 of all this pestilence?

I declare before you all now with assurance :  
 Clytemnestra, my wedded wife, is peerless  
 in beauty, in figure and poise, in elegance :  
 and in thought, and hand-work—yet this girl’s no  
 reduction, however this may be; as it is, I prefer her.

And yet it were better if I gave her back?  
 I have no wish to bring harm to my men.

Well then!  
 I will accept a gift a honour from the Argive army.  
 For without the girl I’ll be the one man without  
 the taste of any spoils of war. That would not be proper.  
 All of you assembled here see that I must give up my prize.”

And brilliant Achilles answered :

“O most honoured king and commander, unequalled

in grasp, where are the great-hearted Achaeans  
 to get you a prize? We men have no common store  
 to pluck one out at will. What each man holds has been  
 taken by his own hands, after obliterating cities.  
 Going round gathering up each man's personal  
 wealth, then doling it out all over again, in  
 new proportion, would be inappropriate in every way  
 thinkable.

Simply give the girl back to the god, and there's an end to it!  
 We Achaeans will pay you back threefold and fourfold after  
 Zeus allows us to bring down Troy's walls."

And King Agamemnon, commander of armies, gave answer :

"I know your ways, mighty Achilles. Be content  
 as a very great warrior, and do not try to get  
 around me in Mind. You can't outdo in all things.  
 In this you will not overtake me. I will not be persuaded.

Perhaps a will to keep your prize compels this word  
 of yours : you would have me return the girl, to keep your hands  
 full : while I would sit here empty-handed.

Very well, then. If the great-hearted Achaean  
 army offers me a gift, in worth equitable  
 to my loss, as I shall judge . . . —But if I am not  
 given this, I will come and take yours. Or the prize  
 of Ajax, or of Odysseus. I will lift it  
 up and take it away. And the gift I will leave  
 for the man I come to will be the anger boiling in him.

Come! Let us return to this later. The shining  
 sea awaits our ships, let us draw them down into  
 the waves, with rowers enough, and a godly number  
 of our best animals, beautiful in hide and hair and fleece.  
 We shall set our precious Chryseis there, and send  
 her away.

One of our best men must command this enterprise :  
 Ajax, or Idomeneus, or δῖος Odysseus.

Or perhaps you, most extreme of men, Achilles?  
 On our behalf, you shall be our emissary  
 to propitiate the far-shooting god. And you  
 will sacrifice all of the victims correctly, I am sure.”

Looking dark, Achilles said :

“ ὦ μοι ! Such hard-glinting shamelessness! And that ‘Mind’  
 uncircuitable but with one thought in heart : profit.  
 Why should the warriors obey your word at all?  
 Whether by sea, or in the heat of battle?  
 Why am I here, facing off spear to spear?  
 I have no argument with the Trojans.  
 They have never yet driven off my cattle,  
 nor stolen my horses. And in my own city  
 of Phthia, land of the richest soils  
 stretched between long-shadowed mountains,  
 they’ve yet to spoil our harvests.  
 They have no mind to cross the sounding sea to do  
 such things to me.



It's you! You shameless, ruthless, greedy man!  
 We're here in this goddamn place for your sake alone!  
 So Menelaus can win back his 'honour', and his wife, Miss  
 Dog-face, from the Trojans. But for reasons unknown  
 you disregard this sacrifice of ours, the whole Achaean  
 army, here for lift you up in glory, and your brother and  
 his wife. You forget all this. And now you'd take away  
 from me my own hard-fought prize? which the Achaean  
 sons allowed me to keep? We wreck all number of towns  
 around Troy, plucking from the Trojans much property;  
 but never yet have I received a prize like those  
 you get when those places fall prey to us.  
 And it's these hands that drive back the clamour  
 where the fighting is worst. But come the division  
 of spoil, and your prize is much greater, while I  
 carry away 'a poor thing, but mine own',  
 and much greater is the satisfaction I feel  
 for the reward of my efforts, when I return  
 exhausted to my ships, full of blood from the fight.

Now I'm off to Phthia. Far better to sail off  
 with my forward ships than stay here and fight,  
 to win riches to toss on to your heap,  
 yet be disrespected for it."

And Agamemnon answered :

"Do it then. You won't hear me asking you to stay  
 here for my sake. An army of men honour me,  
 and Zeus above us, whom all regard as wisest.

And yet only for all the rest of us does Zeus  
 love you, too. Of all the kings in our army  
 the most hateful to me is you—for you enjoy  
 quarrelling with friends as much as cutting Trojans  
 dead! You're one of our strongest, yes, but know that Zeus  
 has allowed this to be, and this *you* forget.

Go home. Take you ships and your men and rule  
 over your Myrmidons at shadowy Phthia.  
 I do not care for you, nor fear your rage;  
 and in this way it shall be.

But hear what shall happen before you step onto  
 your ships. I am coming to your tent and taking  
 your very beautiful prize, Briseïs. Just as Φοῖβος  
 Apollo takes my Chryseis—for it's decided  
 this heavenly beauty is to be sent back home,  
 among our crew and animals on a black ship.

Achilles, now you know which one of us is stronger.

And now no warrior here shall follow such ways  
 as yours, for they will fear to speak such things 'for all  
 to hear', such a word as 'I am as he', and claiming  
 himself my equal, even directly to my face!"

So he spoke.

And the heart inside the broad, fiery-haired chest  
 of Achilles pondered two acts : should he draw his sword  
 from his side, push everyone back and stick its sharpened tip

into King Agamemnon's heart? Or should he stay calm? Was it possible for Achilles to restrain his rage?

So he thought it over in his heart and his mind,  
then reached for the handle of his sharp sword.

And at this very time came Athena,  
to Achilles alone : he alone saw her come  
from Heaven. She seized him by his blonde hair  
and turned him around; and he looked into her  
fearfully-shining eyes, and went stock-still with awe.

His sword stayed sheathed at his side, and he spoke :

"Daughter of Raging Zeus! The strong, and warlike! Our protectress!  
Again you appear—implying, I guess, more irritation?  
Is the ὕβρις , the arrogance of Agamemnon, too much  
to take? If so, hear this word : you shall now see me  
take his life."

And the eyes of the goddess began to shine mildly :

"I've come down to stop you, if I can convince you,"  
she said. "Hera, Woman Above, has sent me here.  
She loves and honours you both in equal measure.  
So please, cease your rage. End this challenge. Lift your hand  
from the handle of your sword.

But pierce him with sharp word.  
Speak out in your way of how things you say will be.

But first hear this I say to you now : for it, too,  
will come to be : his arrogance will be the cause  
that shall bring you three times as many glorious gifts.

So restrain yourself.

Obey me.”

And Achilles answered :

“Whoever hears gods would do best to obey them.”

And he pushed his great sword back in its sheath  
by his thigh, but kept a heavy hand on its handle.  
But he obeyed the word of goddess Athena.

And with one step she was back with the company  
of the gods in the palace of Olympus.

But Achilles was still in a rage, persisting  
in abrasive challenges to the king, saying :

“A wine-guzzler! with a dog face, and the heart  
of a deer! Who sees you arming yourself,  
and leaping into battle with the men?  
Or taking up a post in an ambush,  
out there with the best Achaeans?  
You’d sooner die than fight.

No, you’d rather go among the tents from one side  
to the other and take any man’s prize whose word  
you don’t agree with! Your vocation is eating

people, and you lead weaklings begging to be fed  
to you, commander of an army who can't win!

If not for them, you would never act outrageously again.

Now I say this to you : I shall give a solemn  
oath, with this staff in my hands : this staff,  
which lost the art of leaf- and branch-making  
when it was severed from the stump it left behind  
in the mountains. This shall never sprout afresh,  
for the bronze of the sons of the Achaeans  
have stripped it of leaves and bark, yet carry  
the slender ash in their hands as symbol  
of Right, by those who are called our Judges :  
those who say they bear the laws from Orderer Zeus :  
and draw them out for us : yet hold a fruitless staff.

Hear now my oath : these mighty words :  
at some hour you will look for Achilles among  
the sons of the Achaeans, and he will be gone.  
You'll know then, in all the grief of loss,  
how your own strength alone cannot defend  
again man-killing Hector. You'll know, when you see  
all the bodies of the fallen. Inside, your heart  
will claw at you, in frustration that you  
showed no proper respect to the bravest of the Achaeans!"

Thus spoke Achilles. And he threw down by his feet  
his staff studded with gold nails—ornamentation  
conveying grace and power—and the nail-heads  
in the dirt flashed fire in all men's eyes.

And the assembly watched him sit back down.  
 Then over their heads Agamemnon redoubled  
 his anger at Achilles : but then rose Nestor  
 to his feet, which silenced the king. Nestor,  
 whom all called the 'sweet-speaking' Achaean,  
 the orator from holy Pylos. His tones flowed  
 from his tongue as easy as honey flows,  
 yet in voice of sharp clarity, his intonation  
 like a blade, as glints dazzle warriors' eyes,  
 so word matched word for sway. Such honeyed speech  
 endeared him to the men, who heard, and listened.

In his time two generations had come, and gone;  
 men born with him, raised in holy Pylos, and now  
 faded into the past. And now he stands as king.  
 In age, men thought him a full one hundred in years.

Now Nestor addressed the assembly in all earnesty :

“ὦ πόποι ! The Achaeans swim lost in deep sorrow!  
 Surely Priam would laugh with his sons in sweet joy  
 to hear of his enemies quarrelling themselves  
 into frailty, so surrendering their hope  
 of finding shore—you, the best among us  
 in strategy and war! Hear me now : my older  
 years give me farther sight.

Long ago I kept  
 company with men far more powerful  
 than all of you; and they heard and listened to me.

Such men I have yet to see again. Perhaps I  
 never shall. Peirithous, and Dryas, teacher of men;  
 and Caeneus, and Exadius, and dominant Polyphemos;  
 and some know I knew Theseus, Aegeus' son,  
 a man skilled in many arts, as an immortal  
 would be, and, being as god, is not to be seen  
 now by men in our day. (But must it be so?)

These, the mightiest men ever raised on the earth!  
 Their strength challenged the Centaurs, who had sprung  
 out their mountain holes—and obliterated them.  
 I speak of all that we know well, yet fail to see imitated.

I moved with these men when I went from holy Pylos,  
 a land from far. But from even farther came a summoning  
 for me : for they would have me go with them.  
 Among them I fought my own way when it fell.

Such men I have yet to see again. Perhaps I  
 never shall; and they heard and listened to me.  
 So best for you is to hear me and obey.

Most excellent king, your power must restrain you  
 from leading away the girl from Achilles' tent.  
 Allow her to stand as the gift given by the sons  
 of the Achaeans, as a prize for his bravery.

And you, son of Peleus! Stop choosing  
 to quarrel and compete with our great king,  
 and face off strength to strength, when strength united  
 is required to win this war; and it is very different

to face a man to whom fate has given  
 prerogative to hold the sceptre, no common  
 honour, and allowed to be as it is by Zeus.  
 Your goddess mother gave birth to a powerful son,  
 but Agamemnon, as king over men, has yet  
 more power than you.

O worthy king Agamemnon, restrain your rage.  
 It is I, Nestor, who asks this.  
 Reject all further anger against Achilles,  
 who amid evil battle is a powerful inspiration  
 to all our warriors.”

In answer spoke King Agamemnon :

“Yes, old man, you’ve spoken rightly.  
 But this man would be above all others.  
 He would be superior and give orders to all.  
 This is not a man to obey you, I am sure.”

And δῖος Achilles interrupted him :

“I would be called a good-for-nothing coward,  
 if I nod on every point to your very last word.  
 Order others around, but not me. I hear you  
 no longer. But hear this I say : and it will be so :  
 it would be wrong for me to fight for the girl,  
 with you or with anyone, since I was given her,  
 and thus will I let her be taken away.

But everything mine by my swift black ships



will stay mine. You will take nothing from me  
of what is mine. Nothing will be yours against  
my will. Indeed, come try it, so the assembly  
will know : you will get a spear plunged into you,  
and your dark blood will run out round its shaft of ash-wood.”

And Agamemnon, king of men, stayed silent,  
content to return to this idle challenge later.

Everyone rose, and the assembly dissolved,  
and each went to his separate business and duties,  
leaving behind the many beached black ships.

Achilles walked back to his tent with Patroclus  
at his side, back to his army of Myrmidons  
by their own well-built, well-balanced, long-travelled ships.

But Agamemnon stayed by the restless salt waves  
of the sea. He drew a ship down into the water,  
then appointed twenty oarsmen to occupy  
its wide rows of benches. A hecatomb  
was led on board; then King Agamemnon himself  
led the fresh-faced Chryseis aboard the ship,  
and sat her down. And he chose as captain  
of this voyage πολύμητις Odysseus.

So these set sail over the salt water.

Back at the camp Agamemnon gave a general order  
for purification. So the men went naked  
into the sea, and the dirt they scraped from their skin

defiled the water around their bodies;  
and the sea carried their pollution away.  
Now pure in body and garment, the army  
gave the gods countless beasts, their best available  
of bull and goat, sacrificing them on the sands  
by the ununderstandable sea. And the steam  
of savoury fat rose up with the smoke, and pleased  
Heaven—so the men below hoped.

So the army encampment toiled through the day.

Meanwhile, Agamemnon's most urgent matter  
was to continue his quarrel with Achilles.  
So he summoned his minister Talthibius;  
also Eurybates : two discreet and trusted  
attendants of his.

"Go to the tent of Achilles", he said.  
"Take the hand of the very beautiful  
Briseïs, and bring her here. If he refuses  
to give her, I will return with a company  
of men, and take her myself. That will go harder  
for him."

Thus spoke Agamemnon. Then he sent them  
on their disagreeable business which they were  
constrained to make happen.

So the two men walked reluctantly by the sea-  
spray, and looked out on the ununderstandable  
beyond. Then, sighing, they came to the tents and ships

of the Myrmidons, and he was sitting  
by his tent beside his elaborate black ship :  
and Achilles was not happy to see them.

The two men, wide-eyed with terror, and deeply ashamed,  
stood before the king, and did not say one word.

But Achilles understood, and spoke out to them :

“χαίρε ! boys, who spread the news of Zeus and men;  
come closer! I have no argument with you.  
I know that it’s Agamemnon who’s sent you  
here to lift the girl lightly out of my fingers.  
Briseïs. Ah, come! Patroclus, truly Zeus-born,  
lead the girl gently into the light hands  
of these men, and they will take her away.

But you two men shall be my witnesses  
in this I say, which yet has been only threat,  
but now I make it a promise. Before mortal men,  
before the gods (and we’re told they’re happy)  
above us, and before him, our proclaimed king;—  
when later you collapse toward shameful ruin,  
I will be off in some other direction,  
and looking some other way, when the army  
has need of me. So these rages of his  
are dangerous, and his lack of foresight  
destructive. He lacks sense to see past and future  
together at once; and so his present  
is a mess, and his men now heavily threatened  
when they fight the enemy beside their ships.”

So he spoke. Patroclus obeyed Achilles at once.  
 Old childhood friends, each was the dearest intimate  
 of the other; and never would there be another  
 for each. When Patroclus brought Briseïs  
 from the tent, Achilles, as always, was struck  
 with constant surprise at her heavenly beauty.  
 Patroclus handed her to them to take away.  
 Then the two withdrew into the shadows  
 of their ships on the sand, and listened while  
 the woman went away only unwillingly.

Achilles looked out at the sea, the grey sea,  
 the ancient grey sea still churning its waves  
 unto whenever it is to be : and he sighed :  
 and tears dropped from his eyes. He sat on the sand,  
 and prayed to his mighty mother, reaching out his hands :

“Mother, why bring me into a brief life, yet Zeus  
 High-Thunderer won’t allow me even brief glory?  
 Why live for nothing much?

No, it is not High Zeus  
 who brings my trouble. It is King Agamemnon  
 who disrespects me! He takes my prize for himself!  
 From my fist he plucks with ease what men  
 strenuously should have wrested from my fingers!”

So he sighed, and the tears fell. His mighty mother  
 heard, as she lay seated on the deep water  
 with her father, old man Nereus. She surfaced

out of the sea as a grey mist drifting. She moved  
along the waves with ancient ease, and came round him.

And he felt her touch around him, and heard her call  
his name :

“Child, why tears? Why such hurt in your heart?  
Speak out so we both know.”

With a heavy sigh the quick-footed Achilles answered her :

“You know. Why explain to a goddess who knows all  
already? We obliterated the holy city of Thebe,  
King Eëtion’s seat, and brought back the wealth.  
The army made equitable division of the spoils;  
except that they handed Atreus’ son a wondrous  
fair-faced daughter of a priest—of all people!  
Her name is Chryseis; and Chryses her father  
(who, no small point, is a priest of far-achieving  
Apollo) came to the bronze-armoured army  
to free his daughter, and brought an extravagant,  
shining ransom, and in his hands he held the wreaths  
meant for his head, those for far-shooter Apollo,  
on a staff of gold, and he begged the Achaean army,  
and most of all the two leaders of the others;  
and afterwards all the army clapped and shouted  
in agreement with the priest, showing decency,  
and pleased to receive the splendidly shining ransom.

But unhappy Atreus’ son sent him away,  
unrelenting, and with violence. So the old man

went away agitated and prayed to Apollo,  
 and the god heard his word, and showered us  
 with arrows : now, soldiers died needlessly,  
 one after another, too many to count,  
 from end to end the camp was showered with arrows.

A clear-eyed prophet then spoke to us in assembly,  
 and told us the reason for the bowman's anger.

I, then, spoke first, pleading for us to apologize  
 to the god. But the fury of the son of Atreus  
 redoubled, and the threatening word he spoke  
 has come to be, just as he had said it would be :

The compliant Achaeans are now sailing  
 the girl home to Cryse, bringing with her many gifts  
 for the gods. Meanwhile, from my tent ministers  
 led away the prize the proud army gave me,  
 Briseus' daughter.

Mother, help your son! Protect my purpose,  
 just as you enclose me now in your arms.  
 If ever you had the power to hold the ear  
 of the gods, please rise to Olympus now,  
 and meet Zeus in prayer, for many times  
 you have encouraged his enterprises,  
 and cheered his heart in both word and effort.  
 Many happy times I've heard you remembering,  
 when I was a child in my father's halls—  
 remembering that 'I alone of all immortal  
 gods and goddess saved Zeus from ruin,

when the others aimed to bind him hand and foot,  
 a shameful plan crafted by Poseidon and Athena,  
 and his wife, too.' But you came and set him free.  
 Goddess, you summoned a Hundred-Handed One,  
 the one the gods address as Briareus,  
 pitiless as salt water waves and sea-storms.

When Briareus came to Olympus and sat  
 by the side of Zeus, who relished his brilliance  
 of power, the others feared to pursue  
 their palace revolt, so no hand nor foot was bound  
 that day. 'And Zeus triumphed,' you used to say  
 to me, who loved to hear you say it, and loved you  
 for it. Bring this to mind now, and please go  
 to the side of our mighty father and embrace  
 his knees, and ask him to aid the Trojans.

And as for the others! Let them all be gathered  
 and imprisoned in the sterns of their idle ships,  
 and the Trojan warriors will come and kill them  
 without effort; so that they may hail *their* king  
 with acclaim and love; and that son of Atreus  
 Agamemnon comes to know his blindness  
 in insulting the bravest man of his army."

Then through her sea-salt tears his goddess mother Thetis spoke :

"ὦ μοι ! Child, why did I bring you into this  
 world, if you must suffer as if accursed!  
 It were better to never taste mortality.  
 Sitting safe and sound in peace by your ships,  
 without sorrow, is not to be your fate.

Destiny will not have you live a long life.  
You were doomed at birth to an early death—  
awful to say, and to know it! For we sorrow  
at what you might have been, were not this war  
to be your end.

Terrible was the day  
I birthed you in our halls.

Yet I will go to Zeus High-Thunderer,  
I will rise snowy Olympus, and I will try  
to win him to my word; and in this way answer  
your plea for help : I will tell him your tale in full.

Meanwhile, you stay by your fast-sailing ships.  
Nurse your rage against the army; and keep out  
of the fight. Hear from afar the men calling out  
for your help, before they're butchered open,  
and their insides surface.

But you must wait twelve days. Yesterday, Zeus  
went with Oceanus to the excellent  
Ethiopians, who stand at the limit  
of the world. It is the matter of a banquet,  
nothing more; and the other gods are with them, too.  
But when he returns, I'll kneel on the bronze floor  
of his palace and embrace his knees, and win him  
over to our side, I think."

Thetis, then, goddess of all the sea-nymphs haunting the waters,  
withdrew away over the waves; and left him there, her one son.



He sat on the sands, his rage inciting his limbs  
 like fire inside. They had taken the woman  
 from him by force, against his will!  
 The beautiful, shapely, well-dressed woman.

Meanwhile, Odysseus sailed the black ship  
 into the harbour of Chryse, bearing  
 the noisy holy hecatomb in the hold.  
 He took in the sail and folded it away,  
 then removed the two forestays and lowered  
 the mast onto its rest; and had the ship rowed in,  
 its forty oars waving slowly past the other  
 ships secured at the mooring-place by the shore.

Out from the ship they cast the anchor-stones,  
 and secured the stern-cables.

Out from the ship they came, pushing through the rushing  
 sea-surf; and they were glad to set their feet on shore.

Out from the ship they led the hecatomb  
 of beasts, brought to honour long-working Apollo.

And out from the ship came the daughter of Chryses.  
 Odysseus escorted the girl to the altar,  
 and put her in the arms of her much-loved father.  
 And he said :

“Chryses, king of men Agamemnon has entrusted  
 me to give you your daughter, with the Danaans’  
 best regards. And to sacrifice here to Φοῖβος

a holy hecatomb;—both to propitiate  
the far-shooting god, for now he keeps sending us  
something terrible.”

So he spoke, and put the girl in her father’s arms,  
who received his precious daughter with joy.

Quickly, then, Odysseus brought the animals  
to the altar. Each one came to stand there,  
unaware it was about to have its throat cut.  
Then the men washed; then they took the barley  
grain into their hands :

then Chryses raised his arms and prayed aloud :

“Hear me!” he said. “Apollo of the silver bow!  
Who protects Chryse, and holy Cilla,  
and is mighty master of Tenedos!  
As once I prayed, and once you heard,  
so hear once more as I pray to you now,  
and bring this wish to be : lift the sickness!  
Remove from the Danaans their disgrace and death.”

So he spoke, and Φοῖβος Apollo heard his prayer.

And when their prayers were done, and they had sprinkled  
the barley grains onto the victim, they bent back its head,  
its eyes raised to Heaven, and cut its throat, and bled  
it to death. Then, they peeled its skin off. They cut out  
the thigh-pieces, and placed those precious parts  
on a strip of fat, which they folded over the thigh-pieces,

to cover them; and then over all that were placed  
the raw pieces. All these precious parts were for  
the god to delight in : a savour of honour.

And the old priest Chryses burned everything  
on branches of wood; and poured the fiery wine :  
and the young men upright by him, five in number,  
each held a five-tined fork over the fire,  
and stood silent. Then when the thigh-pieces were burned,  
and the inward parts were tasted of, they cut up  
the rest, and spitted all these pieces, and roasted  
them all skilfully; then drew it all from the iron,  
and piled the roasted meats on platters.

So their efforts were done, they had prepared  
their meal. So they relaxed; and feasted with equal  
share for all; and the hearts of all were pleased.

Then when they sat satisfied with food and drink,  
the youths filled mixing-bowls to the brim with wine.

First they let a few drops fall into each cup,  
then served these out to all, for each man to pour  
to the god.

So all the rest of the day they soothed the god.

They sang the beautiful Παιάν , the choral song  
of thanksgiving and healing. The Achaean sons  
rejoiced while celebrating long-working  
Apollo, who aims from far and hits his mark.

And Apollo from far heard their song, and was cheered.

Then when the sun went down, and darkness came,  
they lay down to rest by the stern-cables of the ship.

And as early-born Dawn spread her rosy fingers

in greeting they rowed out and put to sea,  
and headed back to the Achaean army.  
The tall mast was socketed, and sail raised;  
and Apollo Healer filled the white sail  
with a favourable forward wind. The sea hissed  
round the keel slitting its undulating body  
as the ship went its way with the wind.

When they returned to the extensive camp  
of the Achaean army, they drew the black ship  
onto shore, and set her high upon the sands  
on props, upright among the ordered row  
of black ships balanced along the shoreline  
by the restless sea. And the men scattered  
to their separate tents and own company  
of ships.

But quick-footed Achilles sat by his fast ships,  
in boiling rage. He had no care to go among  
the men who seek glory with words in assembly;  
nor did he go to the fight. He simmered at heart  
as he sat in his spot, yearning for shrieking  
the war-cry, and leaping into the fight.

And in this boiling rage did twelve days pass.

Then into Olympus, far boundary  
encompassing infinity, the gods  
returned as one splendid society,  
with Zeus the head.

And then Thetis surfaced through the waves of the sea.

When Dawn spread around high-peaked Olympus,  
Thetis went up to meet Zeus Endless Thunderer.  
She found him sitting apart from the others,  
on the highest tip of many-peaked Olympus.

She sat by him and embraced his knees with her left  
hand, while her right hand sought to take his chin  
from under, in token of supplication.

And she prayed to Zeus, son of Cronos, highest king :

“Zeus! Father! Surely you remember the help  
I once gave you when the immortals had ideas  
of their own? If so, please make this happen for me :  
Bring honour to my son, my son who is fated  
to a early death, yet king of men Agamemnon  
disrespects him, he’s taken the prize my son  
won with his own hands, and which the army  
allowed to be. So you honour him, Zeus Orderer!

Invest the Trojan warriors with strength  
as yet unmatched by Argive blade, spear, or hand—  
until the army honours my son in the way he deserves!”

Thus spoke Thetis. And cloud-gathering Zeus  
remained for a long while in silence.  
Yet as Thetis clung to his knees, so she  
clung to all of him, and she begged a second time :

“Show you promise with a nod of your head.  
Or else deny this one desire of mine  
and reveal how much you dishonour me!”

Then answered the greatly vexed, cloud-dispersing Zeus :

“This is sickly business you’re setting me.  
You will go from here, and I will be left  
with Hera, who will trouble my spirit  
with her stinging words. She’s only just said  
in front of everyone that I assist  
the Trojans in combat!

Leave here now, go  
back to the sea, before she sees us together,  
and conceives an unhelpful thought. I promise you  
all shall come out as you wish, all for your pleasure.

I see you choose not to believe me. So come now!  
I will nod my head, so you shall know that what I say is true.  
The word I give among the Immortals cannot be broken,  
nor stay unfinished, if I give my nod.”

Thetis watched Orderer Zeus bow his dark brows,  
and the loose, flowing, ambrosial hair of the king  
of the immortals rippled; and infinite Olympus quaked.

Once the two had resolved together in this way,  
they separated. Right away she plunged into  
the deep salt sea, away from glimmering Olympus.  
And Orderer Zeus withdrew into his palace.

At the coming of their father and king,  
 the gods stood up from their sitting-place together.  
 No one dared stay indifferent, but all rose up  
 readily before his shining presence.

He sat down on his throne. And Hera was unable  
 to stop seeing Thetis in her mind, dressed only  
 in sea-froth, daughter of the old man of the sea,  
 sitting in close counsel with her husband apart  
 from the rest. Right away she spoke stinging words  
 to her husband :

“My ever tricky-minded one! Whom of the gods  
 have you shared your wide and long counsel with  
 in secret this time? You keep far too many  
 of such preoccupations to yourself,  
 and weigh them in dark places in these secret ways!  
 Why not kindly tell me what is on your mind this time?”

And then came answer from the father of gods and men :

“Hera, please will you stop this hope you have  
 of ever understanding all of my words!  
 They are increasingly difficult to absorb.  
 Though you are my wife, and understand some  
 of what others won't, you must not question me  
 on what I'd much rather keep to myself,  
 apart from the gods. What is suitable for you  
 to hear, this you shall know before all others.  
 But of my secret matters, search not after each  
 last detail! Question me no further!”

And Zeus stared into his wife's wide brown eyes.

But Hera spoke out :

"The king says such horrid words to me!" she said for all to hear.

"When in earlier times have I asked you  
any questions? Have I ever before searched after  
'each last detail'? You're free to think of whatever  
you will! But I have fear in heart that she might win  
you over, and for what reason, salty-footed  
Thetis, a daughter of the old man of the sea  
of all people! She sat beside you at dawn  
and embraced your knees. And then you nodded  
something sure and certain about Achilles,  
I think it was, how you shall honour him,  
and allow many to die by the ships  
of the Achaeans. This is what I think I heard."

Then spoke cloud-gathering Zeus :

"Marvellous lady! You are always suspecting!  
Up to now I have put up with all of this.  
Say what you will, it will achieve nothing,  
except you'll be pushed further from my heart!  
—then things will turn more miserable for you.  
Even if every word you say is 'sure  
and certain', even so it is how I want it to be!

So sit beside me silently, at least softly,  
and obey my command. For if I raise  
my hands then all the powers of Heaven



together will not stop me coming at you.  
Nothing will protect you if I reach out  
my invincible hand. All the other  
powers will not be able to help you.”

Thus the Orderer Zeus spoke, and his wife  
the wide-eyed Queen Hera sat beside him  
in silence. Fearing her husband, she said  
not one word more. She stifled her anger.

The other gods of Olympus in the palace  
of Zeus were troubled, and first to speak was master-  
artist Hephaestus, and Hera his mother  
was grateful for his courage.

He said :

“This contest of yours derides all balance.  
Hear yourselves! Quarrelling over human beings!  
Like a creeping infection you two will set  
all of Olympus to roaring and brawling!  
What delight will this feast offer any of us,  
if worse wrangling awaits to upset the table?  
Would you make heaven itself unbearable?  
An excellent feast is prepared for us,  
and we should delight in it.

Gently I urge my mother, who herself is full  
of sense, to be pleasant with loving father Zeus;  
so no further scolding disrupts our feast,  
and throws all the gods into confusion.

Zeus Lightning-Producer could scatter us  
 from here instantly, if he chose to do so.  
 Combine all our strength and Zeus still far excels us!  
 So caress him with mild words;  
 and the Olympian will be kind with us.”

This he said; then rose from the table, and set  
 affectionately in his mother’s hand  
 the golden two-handled cup of nectar.

And he said :

“Patience, mother. Tolerate your troubles,  
 and hold your head high. My eyes, which give you  
 the intensity of my love, would not like to see  
 you get struck. All my tremendous sorrow  
 wouldn’t give me power enough to defend you.  
 For the consequences are immeasurable  
 if one faces off against the Olympian.

Once before, when I was defending you,  
 Zeus took me by the foot and threw me out  
 of glorious heaven. All day long till  
 the sun went down I fell, till nightfall,  
 when I hit the small target of island  
 Lemnos in the sea, with little life left in me.  
 There the Sintian people quickly came to help,  
 and took good care of me after my fall.”

So he spoke, and slim-armed Hera, Woman Above,  
 smiled. And she took from her son the shining cup,

smiling still.

Then the gods turned to the pleasurable nectar.  
Hephaestus drew one by one from the mixing-bowl  
and served it round the table, from left to right.  
And as its happy properties of hallucinogenia  
kicked in, an uproarious laughing erupted  
among the happy gods in the palace.  
For some reason they found their Hephaestus,  
panting and puffing in concentration  
as he drew for each drinker from the bowl,  
amusing, for some reason, up there in heaven.

All day long, as the sun sank toward the stream,  
they had their feast; and each enjoyed equal share  
of the goodness; and all hearts finally felt peace,  
outwardly at least, while Apollo held his lovely lyre,  
and the Muses sang in alternation with sweetest voice :  
one sister would call out, and another would answer her.

When the shining light had gone below for the night,  
each went to one's own place of rest—though all places  
here were the beautiful hand-work of Hephaestus,  
crooked-footed artist, the god who limps  
while he walks around, creating with his skilful mind.

Olympian Zeus Lightning-Producer  
lay down to rest, and sweet sleep came.  
Beside him in bed lay golden-throned Hera.

End of Book I

## Book II

All those who drive the chariots into battle,  
 all the soldiers of the Achaeans by the sea,  
 slept in peace under the restless stars : and the gods,  
 settled over everything that is or will ever be,  
 likewise lay in silence : all night long : but Zeus  
 was awake, thinking how to honour Achilles,  
 and kill many Achaeans by their anchored ships.

So he arrived at what he thought was his best plan :  
 he would send Agamemnon a terrible nightmare.

So he spoke into the dark, and a changing thing came :

“Evil dream,” the king spoke, “go now down to the sleeping  
 ships of the Achaean army, to the tent of commander  
 of men Agamemnon, son of Atreus. (Atreus,  
 who fed children into his brother’s avid mouth,  
 his brother’s own sons, if you can stomach the truth!)

As I say to you, so you will do. Command him  
 to arm for battle immediately all of his long-haired  
 Achaeans; for just now the chance is theirs to take  
 the high-rising city, once and for all.

He will think : ‘The immortals have joined forces on Olympus.  
 Hera’s prayers have bent all those who heard her to her purpose :  
 now death comes finally to the Trojans!’”

Thus spoke Zeus, king of light and dark.

And the dream heard, and went swiftly to the ships,  
 those supported on props beside the seashore's froth.  
 Within the Achaean army tents the dream came  
 to Agamemnon, and poured through him ambrosial  
 vision.

And into his ear came the voice of Neleus' son,  
 Nestor, the elder most prized by Agamemnon :  
 and it spoke :

"You sleep? Atreus' son, horse-tamer wise in war?  
 Do not long for the night, when people are cut off  
 in their place. Too much sleep imperils the man thinking  
 for the whole army, which has entrusted itself,  
 and its enormous responsibilities, to you.

Hear me : I hold heavy words from Zeus himself to hand to you.  
 Though far from here, he feels your distress, and pities you.

Command the Achaeans to arm for battle.  
 Right now you will shatter high-rising Troy!  
 The immortals have joined forces on Olympus.  
 Hera's prayers have bent all those who heard her to her purpose :  
 now death comes finally to the Trojans, through the will of Zeus!

But I warn you : keep this in mind when honeyed sleep  
 relaxes its grip, and sends you up."

So the Dream receded from his ear and left him  
 as he lay, where he pondered in heart on things  
 hopeful to him, but never to be. For inside him  
 he believed he would take Priam's city that day!

Fool!

How can a mind of man, despite reach and polish,  
 contrive as Zeus does? who had already destined  
 to place much pain in the hearts of the Achaean  
 and the Trojan alike, putting many groans  
 in their throats as they faced off in brutal combat.

And so Agamemnon awoke from sleep;  
 yet the dream still clung to him; and whether  
 hope or prophecy, the king believed it.

He sat up straight. First, he covered himself  
 with soft tunic, a beautiful shining linen;  
 then stepped into his gorgeous robe of royalty.

He bound a lovely pair of sandals to his feet.  
 Around his shoulders he hung his silver-studded  
 sword; and then he took into his hand the sceptre  
 of his fathers : invincible always.

Thus he went among the ships of the bronze-armoured Achaeans.

Now up in high Olympus the light of Dawn began to shine,  
 and Zeus and all of the immortals felt her welcoming touch.

Down below, Agamemnon ordered his ministers  
to summon the army to assembly.

They gave clear-voiced summons, and the army  
of Achaean warriors heard, and started for the meeting  
place, a great movement of men.

Meanwhile, Agamemnon met with the elders  
in the privacy of his tent, where he supposed  
himself devising a shrewd and sagacious plan :

“Hear me, friends, for a god came to me in my sleep.  
This very night, an ambrosial voice resembling  
δῖος Nestor spoke into my ear and said to me :

‘Hear me : for I hold words from Zeus himself.  
Though far from here, he feels your distress.  
Command the Achaeans to arm for battle.  
Right now you will shatter high-rising Troy!’

And then it was gone, flown away. Then sweet sleep  
released me and let me up. So come now!  
We must arm the Achaeans for battle!

But we must act wisely in this with the men.  
Let us first test the favour of this idea.  
I will speak to them of the threat of battle,  
and urge them to fill their ships with rowers  
and flee Troy and its warriors. But you  
on all sides speak out in opposition



to this, and prevent the army's retreat."

So spoke Agamemnon, with powerful confidence.

Now, rising from his seat, the elder most precious  
to the king, and himself a king, of sandy Pylos,  
came Nestor : who addressed the assembly in all earnesty :

"O friends, our Achaean leaders and counsellors,  
if any other of us had told us this dream,  
we might reject it as a devious trick,  
a false thing : but we see the best of us  
telling us this. So come! Let us arm for battle!"

So he spoke, and the elders left the tent;  
and all kept their trust in their commander,  
all the many sceptred kings : and they came  
to the meeting place where the assembly  
of warriors stood together, aroused and agitated.  
Even as masses of bees, up from out of a rock,  
gust into the air growing with fresh swarms,  
and cluster over the flowers of spring,  
flitting here and there over all : just so the ranks  
of men from tent and ship advanced in rows  
to the gathering place on the wide shore  
by the sea. And with them Rumour like a wildfire sparked  
courage and encouragement, a message from Zeus,  
urging on the effort : and thus they all came to assembly.  
Under the disturbance of over a hundred thousand men  
the earth rumbled, as each sat in spot; and a clamour arose  
of voices : and the nine ministers shouted for calm and to hear

the king, beloved of Zeus. Finally, with earnest effort,  
the ministers settled everyone down, and quieted  
all the back-and-forth yelling : and Agamemnon  
king of men arose, sceptre in hand, and all saw.

This sceptre was the hand-work of Hephaestus,  
who had applied much concentration to this art.  
Hephaestus gave it to Zeus, who gave it to Hermes;  
and Hermes Δολιος passed it to horse-driver  
Pelops. And Pelops bestowed it on wise Atreus;  
and at his death Atreus left it for Thyestes  
to pick up, a man rich in flocks : then handed down  
for Agamemnon to hold, who now rules over  
Argos, and many dominions of the mainland  
around it, and many islands.

Holding this sceptre up high, he spoke to the men :

“O friends, heroes, Δαναοί , the hands of the god  
of war and slaughter, Ἄρης himself, Destructor :  
hear me!

Zeus War-bringer has led me into blind folly!  
He, the god himself, promised me, with a nod of  
his head, that we would hold out here until  
Troy’s high walls were pulled down and the city  
obliterated;—and then we would go our way  
home. But now he gives me evil and deceitful  
guidance—he commands me to return to Argos!  
An inglorious sight after the loss of so many men!  
This, then, is as the supreme god would have it,

who brings to dust whole cities, and lowers the head  
of one man; for his power is greatest.

A odious tale this shall be, heard of by those  
yet to be on the earth, of how the Achaeans  
fought with only so many, yet so well;  
yet all their mastery of fighting brought nothing.

We fight an army smaller than ours, yet  
are unable to win decisively.

And we see no end in sight.

And if we so chose to do,  
Achaean and Trojan,  
to make solemn promise  
with sacrifice, then reckon up the number  
of our armies, including all the Trojan  
homes in the city; and we Achaeans  
were thoroughly ordered and reckoned up  
in companies of ten; and each company  
would use a Trojan man to pour its wine  
for drinking;—then many of our companies  
of ten would go without a wine-pourer!  
Just so great I say we outnumber the Trojans  
who live inside the city! But Troy has many  
allies, many spearmen, that distract us  
from finally flattening the comfortable  
citadel of Ilium to dust. Nine years now  
—wasted here! Each year a blessing from Zeus,  
now gone. Our ships' timber is rotting away;  
and all their cables undoing themselves.  
And what about our wives? And our little ones,  
who live now as children and sit idly

in our halls, waiting to receive us most  
 favourably. As it is, the work we came here  
 to do continues unsuccessful. So come then!  
 As I say, so shall you hear : we are going home!  
 Let us take flight on our ships and get out of here!  
 For we will never take high-rising Troy!”

Thus spoke Agamemnon, rousing the hearts  
 of all the warriors inspired by his speech,  
 and all the other half who hadn't heard a word  
 of it. So the multitude of the assembled  
 army rushed on like the long waves of the Icarian Sea  
 when the East Wind or South Wind rouses it to fury,  
 diving down from the clouds of Zeus Descender.  
 Or when the West Wind, rushing into a cornfield,  
 swoops along the standing grain, and all nod their head  
 to the breeze : just so were all the men now in motion,  
 and with much outcry and shouting were rushing  
 to their ships, and the dust their feet raised filled the air  
 with cloud. They encouraged one another to take hold  
 of the ships and drag them into the sparkling δῖος sea.  
 So they cleared out the trenches, that would slip  
 the ships down into the waves : while their cries and shouts  
 reached Heaven, so happy were they to be heading  
 homeward!

So they started to remove the props and supports  
 from under the standing ships.

Then the Argives may have returned home against fate,  
 somehow : but Hera spoke to goddess Athena :

“ὦ πόποι ! child of Zeus Contriver,  
 my ever-evolving trickster Athena!  
 Is it possible for these men to take flight  
 over the shapely sea, and get home to wherever?  
 Would they leave behind, for Priam and Troy’s delight,  
 their precious Helen, for whom they’ve killed so many  
 all these years? All those bodies lost to their homeland?  
 Go now to that ‘bronze-armoured’ ‘long-haired’ Achaean  
 army, and restrain each man with sensible words.  
 Stop them dragging their sharp-prowed ships into the water.”

So spoke Hera, and shining-eyed goddess Athena  
 obeyed. Down from the peaks of Olympus  
 with one step she came to the so-called ‘swift’  
 ships of the Achaeans. There, she saw Odysseus  
 standing at his black ship, but putting no hand to it.  
 He looked distressed in heart and soul at the tumult  
 around him. So the shining-eyed goddess Athena  
 came close to Odysseus, and whispered in his ear :

“Zeus-born son of Laertes, subtle-minded one!  
 So you’re off to row away like crazed birds in flight  
 from Priam and Troy? and leave them to enjoy  
 precious Helen? For whose sake far too many men  
 have lost their lives!

Yet you would go home? No! You must stop this!  
 Go through the army of the Achaeans  
 and restrain each man using sensible words  
 from dragging their curved ships into the sea.”

So spoke Athena, whose voice he recognized,  
 and as she spoke he broke into a run  
 and flung away his cloak along the way.  
 Eurybates, an Ithacan friend and servant  
 to Odysseus, took up the cloak and folded it away,  
 while Odysseus ran up to Agamemnon.

Sceptre was handed between them, as sign of accord.  
 Odysseus now spoke for the army, holding  
 the staff of the fathers : invincible always.

Thus he rushed away along the beached ships of the Achaeans.

And as he ran through the confused army  
 he looked for kings, and pre-eminent counsellors;  
 and to each he spoke out in an attempt to restore order :

“Good man! This panic is monstrous!—It’s nauseating!  
 Stand to order! And get everyone around you  
 to stand to order! You act as if you have clear  
 understanding of the mind of Agamemnon—  
 but you don’t! *All that he said was an attempt  
 to test us!* So I don’t think he’s receiving this  
 right now with any joy. Virtually none of us  
 heard what was said in his tent before assembly,  
 and now this!—More evil work to enrage  
 Agamemnon, commander of men, against the men!

But what do they say? Great-hearted kings are beloved of Zeus;  
 for all that is, is as he allows it to be,

Zeus Counsellor, Contriver, Orderer.”

And to each warrior he found in confusion  
he struck him brutally with the sceptre;  
and he called out his command sharp and clear :

“You! Stand there! Shut your mouth! Listen to your orders  
from your superiors! You’re lazy and weak!  
You contribute nothing encouraging here!  
If you want to be as kings, then follow a good king!  
There must be one king and one commander,  
whom Zeus allows to raise the sceptre over us,  
both in judgment, and on the field of battle.  
So stand there and keep your mouth shut,  
and listen to your orders from your superiors!”

Thus Odysseus commanded the men  
as he moved through the befuddled army  
by the ships. Finally, though still agitated,  
they rushed back from the ships and tents and reassembled,  
bringing with them a colossal roar of voices,  
like searush roaring up the sea-shore from the deep.

Now each man sat, and received orders to remain  
where they sat : and of them all, there was one man  
who kept speaking. Thersites. Endlessly his tongue  
brewed abusive words about one and all.  
He was a man of many words, but celebrated  
as the keeper of the meanings of very few  
of the ones he used when challenging the word  
of a king. Imagine a mind without order,

spilling out words willy-nilly, with no knowledge  
 whatsoever to boast of. But he delivered  
 whatever words he hoped would bring a laugh  
 to the Argives. Of all the men who came to Troy,  
 he was the unluckiest Argive of them all.  
 Thersites was bow-legged : his stick-thin legs  
 bowed outward even when he stood upright  
 and still : and the word for this condition  
 was rare even by Homer's time : *φολκός* .  
 He dragged one foot when he walked. And both his shoulders  
 rounded in upon his chest, so that he always  
 looked sunken in, with head hanging low on his neck  
 below a hunchback. And so ill-favoured was he  
 at birth that the Homeric list of ills continues :  
 his head tapered to a point, and weak wispy hair  
 grew only here and there on it. 'The most hateful  
 man in the army', agreed Achilles and Odysseus,  
 for they were often victims of his unlimited insults,  
 of which he knew the meanings of some of the worst;  
 and his yapping abuse reached even to king and commander  
 Agamemnon. Every Achaeon in the army carried a just  
 grudge against their leader. Thersites was somehow  
 shrewd enough to use this unrest in his favour,  
 to get laughs. But his relentless abuse emerged  
 from a squeaky, high-pitched, far-resonating voice  
 that, however humorous, was hard for everyone to bear  
 for long, though the man never stopped talking.

Now, amid the men, he shouted abuse at Agamemnon :

"Son of Atreus!" he cried. "Now what? Your tent is full



of bronze! Countless women lie there, gifts of honour  
 from your army, each one plucked from the spoils  
 whenever we obliterate a citadel in your honour!  
 Perhaps you're lacking in gold? No, it can't be that!  
 Why not just have some boy of Ilium snatched,  
 and get his horse-breeding father to hand over  
 Trojan gold as ransom for his son? whom  
 I and others will bring you all bound up  
 for your convenience! Or a woman's on your mind?  
 Or rather a girl, with whom you'd lie with in love  
 and keep her all for yourself, apart from the rest!

Farcical! That the king himself leads the army  
 into anarchy! Imbecilic 'sons of the Achaeans',  
 in this rotten sun you men have mellowed  
 into women! Unwholesome leftovers!  
 Drones and clogs!

Let us do nothing short of sailing home!  
 We'll leave our honoured king here on his own  
 to pleasure himself with his many prizes!  
 When the Trojans come to disjoint his parts,  
 he'll have agonizing leisure to think on  
 how valuable the Achaean army was to him!

Even now, he disrespects Achilles!  
 Consider Achilles, a man far better  
 than Agamemnon, as every soldier knows;  
 yet our king plucked the prize of Achilles  
 from his fingers, from the hand that took  
 the prize in the first place! And king Agamemnon

keeps her for himself, and deprives δῖος Achilles  
 of her charms! But no, no, absolutely not!  
 There is no rage in the spirit of Achilles;  
 such royal arrogance is beneath the warrior's spirit.  
 Otherwise it would have been Agamemnon's final insult."

Thus spoke Thersites, abusing the commander  
 of the army. Odysseus came to his side.  
 Glaring at him from beneath dark brows,  
 he rebuked him cruelly, saying :

"Thersites! Constant babbler! Like a lyre  
 that sings as birds do, continuously strummed!  
 Shut your mouth! You wish on your own to quarrel  
 with kings? I question the gods why a man as great  
 as Agamemnon, who leads countless men  
 by the high walls of Troy, would have you here  
 with us, the most inferior of men imaginable!

This I tell you, and this I tell you will happen :  
 if you remain foolish, and I see you again  
 as you are now, I will strip myself even of  
 my proudest title—father of Telemachus—  
 in my mania to seize you and tear away  
 your cloak and tunic that hide your nakedness;  
 and to hear your weeping and wailing  
 as you walk back to the ships, humiliated  
 out of the assembly by an Olympic beating!  
 So breathe out the names of kings at your peril.  
 You will do so no longer! Far better you sit  
 quiet, and help end this army-wide disturbance!"

So spoke Odysseus, who then struck Thersites  
 with the sceptre between his shoulder-blades.  
 And he cowered on the ground, all doubled-up;  
 and a heavy tear fell from his eye.

Odysseus saw the bruising he'd left  
 on Thersites, then looked at the golden sceptre  
 in his hands; and he smiled in his eyes.

Thersites, meanwhile, got back in position  
 with a silly expression, though his fear was plain  
 to see. And he wiped away his tear in the eyes  
 of all the warriors watching the spectacle.  
 And though they were troubled, they all laughed together.

Thus one would turn to the next man and say :

“ ὦ πόποι ! Good Odysseus has brought wisdom  
 incalculable times in counsel; and in war  
 he arms himself with helmet and weapons  
 and stands fighting beside the rest of us;  
 but now he outdoes his former glories!  
 Odysseus δῖος has done us a good turn!  
 He has shut Thersites up! We shall hear  
 no more of that outrageous word-slinging.  
 Surely his heroic courage shall vomit up  
 no more abuse of our kings from his vile mind!”

So spoke the majority of the people.

By this time Odysseus destroyer of cities had come  
 to stand with sceptre in hand before the entire army.  
 By him stood shining-eyed Athena, and all those who saw her  
 saw a minister of the people summoning all to silence,  
 so that Odysseus might be heard by all sons  
 of the Achaeans both near and far,  
 and his words understood, and supported.

Now he addressed the assembly in all earnesty :

“Son of Atreus! Just now, the people you command  
 spoke of you as a joke! They are eager to turn  
 you into a proverbial ‘most despicable of men’.  
 Though the people have yet to fulfil the promise  
 they made when they came here with you to Troy—  
 the promise to tear down the high walls of the city,  
 and to obliterate everything inside—  
 now like babies and widows they wail for home!

Truly the toil of battle leaves us tired  
 to death, and eager to return to our children  
 and wives. One month of rowing on the bench  
 is enough for a man, far from his wife,  
 to feel harassed; and then to face the winter  
 winds incensing the waves to stop him reaching home :  
 everything gets increasingly harder to bear!  
 Nine years now we’ve been here.

So I'm not surprised that the Achaean army  
is angry! It has stood its ground for so long a time :  
but is now heading home with empty hands.

But isn't heading home empty-handed shameful  
even to think of? No! Friends! We must be patient!  
We must hold out here, and hope for the best—  
that the prophecies of Calchas are true!"

And Odysseus paused his speech, marking the silence  
of the army before him, then continued on :

"In the hearts of everyone here, who yet have all  
outrun the goddesses of fate, you remember well,  
as if but a day has passed, when all our ships  
were gathered at Aulis, burdened with sorrow  
for the troubles of Priam and the Trojans.  
There was a spring flowing clear up out of the earth.  
Around it we were sacrificing on our holy altars  
the hecatombs that give delight to the immortals.  
There was a beautiful plane-tree, and at its root  
gushed the bright water. Then a tremendous sign  
from heaven came near. It was a serpent,  
a gory-looking creature coloured flame-red  
on its back : a prodigy terrible to look on,  
for the Olympian himself had brought it to us.  
In the daylight it darted out from under  
the altar and raced to the trunk of the plane-tree.  
Now on the tree's highest branch a nest held the little  
ones of a sparrow, eight tender nestlings  
trembling beneath the leaves; and the mother

was the ninth. And we listened to the pitiful  
cries of the little ones as the snake coiled up  
and began to swallow them, one by one,  
while the mother circled round and round  
overhead, grieving for her little ones.

Then the snake sprung onto the mother's wing  
as she flew shrieking. So the flame-coloured serpent  
devoured the sparrows, then slipped out of the light,  
vanishing under the altar by the clear-gushing spring.  
When we looked, the serpent was changed to stone,  
and we knew Zeus himself had brought this to us.  
We stood amazed, and wondered what it meant.  
A terrible sight had disrupted our holy sacrifice!  
So prophet Calchas straightaway addressed our assembly :

'I ask you, mighty Achaeans, why have you become silent?  
This sign has Zeus brings to us will one day be true,  
and its fame shall live always! Nine sparrows, nine years!  
Just so long shall we fight there! But in the tenth year  
we shall obliterate the city down to dust!  
So come now! Achaean warriors, be patient!  
The city of Priam is yours to take!'"

So spoke Odysseus. And the army raised a mighty shout  
of praise that echoed all round the ships : for the men  
approved the words of their godlike Odysseus.

Then the horseman of Gerenia, Nestor, spoke :

" ὦ πόποι ! Are you idiot children sitting in debate?  
Or are you warriors engaged in battle?

What about all our treaties? all our oaths?

What will become of all our promises?

What will our word mean to anybody?

No! Let all our councils, all our plans, all our pouring out  
of unmixed wine, all our pledges with right hands raised :  
fling it all into the fire!

Behold, men! We waste our time with words, which won't bring victory!

You, son of Atreus, Agamemnon, leader of Achaeans,  
shall not be pressed like an olive! You shall stand unmoved in will,  
and lead the men through mighty fights! You will ignore  
those like Thersites, or Achilles, who speak foolishly here,  
or plan in secret elsewhere—and no good will come  
of all their devising! Let them be the first  
to return to Argos! Let them live out their lives  
never coming to know the voice of Zeus!

No. If any man is so eager to return to the waves—  
go on! Let him put his hand to his ship. And then  
he shall quickly meet his death before our eyes!”

Then Nestor paused in his speech, marking the silence  
of the army before him; then he continued :

“Now, king and commander Agamemnon,  
hear my reasoning, and depend upon it :  
there is no worthless word that I shall speak!

Arrange the men back into their separate clans.

Clansman must help clansman. These clans, tribes, brotherhoods :

they must all support one another!  
 If you do this, and if the Achaeans obey  
 in this, we will find which warriors still with us  
 are the best we have, and which are weaklings :  
 for the clans will fight within themselves to find their leaders.  
 Then, once and for all and for all time we shall come  
 to know if Olympian Fate and Destiny  
 are on our side—and we take the city!

Or if we are to fail because of men :  
 their cowardice; or brainlessness in war.”

Then king and commander Agamemnon answered :

“Again, mighty Nestor, you prevail in speech  
 before the assembly of the sons of the Achaeans!  
 By father Zeus, by Athena, by Apollo,  
 if I had ten more such counsellors around me  
 then Priam would stand now with head bent before me,  
 and his proud city obliterated to dust,  
 which a little water would wash clean from our hands!

But Zeus brings me pointless quarrel and confusion,  
 and I suffer through it! Achilles and I  
 have butted heads with hard words over a girl,  
 and I admit before you all that it was I  
 who first brought that pointless quarrel to fruition.  
 But once more we must function as one mind.  
 Then the Trojans will have spent their last hours alive,  
 and evil will visit without delay!



So this is what we are to do. All warriors!  
 Go to your meal. Then we will wake Ἄρης .  
 Each man sharpen his sword well.  
 Each man buckle up his shield well.  
 Look well to your horses, and give them food.  
 Look round your chariots well, and ready them  
 for the fight. Everything done well, so all day long  
 we'll hold up strong in combat. There shall be no rest,  
 not the least, till night comes to part the furious  
 warriors. I don't want to see a man but whose  
 shield straps round his shoulders reek with sweat,  
 and whose hand hangs heavy from forcing the spear,  
 and whose horse shines with sweat, as it brings back  
 its glittering chariot. Then we will have taught Troy  
 the price of sighing for the beauty of Helen!

And if I see any man away from the fight,  
 standing apart by the propped ships, believe these words,  
 for they're certain : that man will be food for dogs and birds!"

So he said, and the men shouted out in approval  
 like a wave crashing against a high headland,  
 when the South Wind comes to shove it forward  
 through all the other waves from all the other winds  
 churning round the cliff. Then they rose up and scattered  
 in haste back to their ships, where they lighted fires  
 in their tents, and ate their meal. Then each man sacrificed  
 to the gods who have neither beginning nor end;  
 and prayed that he might get through the next hours  
 alive. King of men Agamemnon slit the throat  
 of a fat bull, five years old, as a gift for hyper-mighty

Zeus; and he let various of the elders,  
 the best of the Achaeans, to each raise a call  
 to the god : Nestor, first; then King Idomeneus;  
 then the two Ajaxes; and then Diomedes,  
 son of Tydeus; and sixth and last, Odysseus,  
 who in plans was as fertile as the gods.

Then Menelaus appeared, though uninvited;  
 and he instantly forgave his brother this slip,  
 for he knew just how many thoughts burdened king and commander.

All the men gathered round the bull, and took the barley in hand,  
 and Agamemnon prayed aloud :

"Zeus, highest, who moves the dark clouds, and is the air :  
 May the sun not set, nor darkness come, till I have  
 pulled Priam's palace down into smoke, and everything  
 between door and door is burning away, and my sword  
 pierces Hector's tunic, now ragged from the bronze;  
 and round his body many of his people join him in the dust."

So he spoke, but not yet did Zeus bring this to be.  
 The god, though welcoming the gift of sacrifice,  
 in reply only escalated the fury of battle.

So when they had prayed, and sprinkled the barley meal,  
 they drew back each beast's neck and slit its throat.  
 Then flayed each body; and cut away the thigh-slices  
 and wrapped them in a double layer of fat,  
 and laid raw pieces of flesh on top. They burned up  
 all this on a pile of leafless branches.

The inward parts they fixed to spits and held over  
the fire of Hephaestus. Then, when the thigh-slices  
were fully burnt, and they had tasted the inward parts,  
they cut up the rest and spitted the pieces  
and held them over the fire, and roasted everything  
skilfully, then drew off the spits. When all the work  
was done, and the meal was prepared, they feasted,  
and no heart went unfulfilled at the feast.

Then when they were satisfied with the food and drink,

master of horses Nestor spoke out :

“Agamemnon, of all kings most glorious,  
let us sit here no further, let us no further  
delay the work that god has dropped into our hands.  
So come now! Let us issue the call to assembly  
at the ships, and bring up the bronze-wearing warriors  
in close order through the camp, and quickly waken  
fierce Ἄρης .”

Thus spoke Nestor, and Agamemnon heard.

He ordered his ministers to gather the men.

Straightaway all the ministers summoned  
loudly all the long-haired Achaeans to war.

And all the kings standing round Agamemnon  
returned to their troops, and arranged them well.

And through all the bustle moved shining-eyed goddess Athena,  
holding the precious αἰγίς , the shield both ageless  
and undecaying. Seeing it brought a man pain,  
it was too beautiful to see : with its hundred

tassels of well-plaited pure gold thread  
fluttering in the air, each one bright as the sun,  
and as priceless. With this she sparked like lightning  
through the army camp of the Achaeans,  
urging them on, and arousing in the heart  
of each man an implacable courage  
and ceaseless desire to fight in furious battle.  
Now their dear homelands were utterly forgotten;  
their sweetest thoughts were of the battlefield.

As a great fire burns a forest immense along a ridge  
of mountain peaks, and the light is visible from far,  
just so, coming from the bronze, was a heavenly  
shining, bright as the sun, filling the air entire  
and rising up past the limit of sight to the home of the gods.

Like airborne assemblies of birds, fully-fledged,  
flying over the meadows by the Caystrian streams,  
the geese and the cranes, flapping here and there,  
rejoicing in their wings; and crying as they perch,  
and the meadows resound with the outcry of birds :  
just so, many clans poured out from the ships and tents  
and spilled onto the plain of the Scamander,  
and the earth rumbled fearfully beneath the tramp  
of men and horses. So they came to stand  
on the plain of the Scamander, an army of men  
countless as the leaves and flowers that come to be  
each season of spring.

Just as all the flies whirling round in the sheep-folds  
of the flocks on the farms in the season of spring

when the milk spills over the pails : just so, many  
 were the assembly of Achaeans soldiers  
 arrayed on the plain, eager to destroy  
 the great city of Troy.

And when broad flocks mingle while grazing in the fields,  
 but the goat-herders sort easily the herds back to order,  
 just so had the leaders brought the men into shape,  
 and now led them in close order formation into battle.

Within the army of men went King Agamemnon;  
 and all his warriors saw him as Zeus Endless Thunderer.  
 He showed all the grace of Ἄρης and Ποσειδῶν :  
 in his sharp eyes, in his powerful chest.

In a flock overspreading a field, one great bull  
 will stand out pre-eminent above the rest,  
 and his superiority is conspicuous to all  
 who see; just so, as most extraordinary of men among  
 all the great men that day, Zeus placed Agamemnon  
 as most prominent of heroes among heroes.

### The Catalogue of Ships

Now, Muses, goddesses breathing the fresh air of Olympus :  
 Inspirers of Art! Faculty of Artfulness itself,  
 that allows all the Arts to breathe out into life!  
 You, the beginning, the origin of Art and Memory!  
 Speak now, Muses! who are, and who are present

here and everywhere, and know everything that is,  
while we men know only Rumour, and nothing more.

Speak of the leaders and kings of the Danaans.

Of the multitude of men consolidated  
as one army—no, not even if ten tongues  
fluttered within ten mouths with voice implacable,  
and the spirit inside me was of bronze,  
could I make mention of that from end to end,  
unless the Muses, daughters of Zeus, summoned it  
to memory, and brought back all that happened at Ilium.

Now, in entirety, I shall speak of the leaders and kings  
of the fleets of the ships, and in refined order.

Of the Boeotians, Peneleos τε Leïtus were ἄρχων ,  
τε Arcesilaus τε Prothoënor τε Clonius :  
τε those who lived in Hyria, τε rocky Aulis,  
τε Schoenus τε Scolus τε mountainous Eteonus;  
τε Thespeia, τε Graia; τε broad, grassy Mycalessus;  
who lived around Harma τε Eilesium τε Erythrae;  
who held Eleon τε Hyle τε Peteon τε Ocalea τε broad city Medeon;  
τε Copae, τε Eutresis, τε Thisbe, where doves fly;  
who inhabited Coroneia; τε grassy Haliartus;  
who held Plataea; and lived in Glisas;  
who held high citadel Thebe  
and the splendid grove of Poseidon in holy Onchestus;  
who held Arne and its fertile vineyards; καὶ Mideia  
καὶ Nisa; καὶ τε most sacred Anthedon, far remote.  
The Boeotians came with ships fifty;

on each came youths one hundred and twenty.

With the Minyae who lived in Aspledon τε Orchomenus

came ἄρχων Ascalaphus and Ialmenus, son of Ares.

Ialmenus was conceived in secret

in the palace of Actor, who entered the inner chamber

of the no-longer-bashful maiden Astyoche.

With these, thirty hollow ships came in ordered advance.

ἄρχων of the Phocians were Schedius and Epistrophus,

sons of great-hearted Iphitus, Naubolus' son;

these held Cyparissus τε rocky Pytho;

τε sacred Crissa καὶ Daulis καὶ Panopeus;

these held Anemoreia, τε Hyampolis;

who raised homes by δῖος river Cephissus;

who held Lilaea by the springs of Cephissus.

Of the Phocians forty black ships came

in ordered rows, and prepared for battle,

sailing in with the Boeotians on their left.

Ajax came as leader of the Locrians.

Ajax, the speedy son of Oïleus, not the great

Ajax Telamon's son, not nearly so :

this Ajax was a little man with breast-plate of linen;

but as spearman he surpassed all Achaeans and Hellenes.

These lived in Cynus τε Opus τε Calliarus τε

Bessa τε Scarphe τε elegant Augeiae

τε Tarphe; καὶ Thronium, amid the many streams

of river Boagrius. In forty black ships came the Locrians,

who lived beyond holy Euboea.

καὶ those who held Euboea, the Abantes,  
 breathing rage; who held Chalcis τε Eretria;  
 καὶ Histiaea, where grape-bunches clustered;  
 τε Cerinthus on the sea; τε Dion on the high peaks;  
 who held Carystus; and lived in Styra.  
 Descended-of-Ares Elephenor,  
 Chalcodon's son, was leader and ἄρχων  
 of the great-hearted Abantes.  
 With him came his long-haired warriors,  
 incoming spearmen thrusting through enemy breast-plates  
 murderous ashen spear-points.  
 With him came forty black ships.

καὶ those who held Athens, deep-rooted city,  
 the people of high-spirited Erechtheus,  
 whom the grain-gifting soil brought to life.  
 Far-seeing Athena Zeus Goddess raised him there  
 in her own sumptuous grove. Athenian youths,  
 even now, sacrifice bulls and rams there  
 amid the poplar trees, praying for mercy.  
 With them as leader was Menestheus, Peteos' son.  
 I would say that no man had yet been born  
 with his skill for ordering horses and arranging  
 shield-bearing men. Nestor alone  
 might challenge him in this, for he was the older  
 and more experienced. With him came fifty black ships.

Ajax from Salamis led twelve ships, and placed them  
 where the Athenians had gathered in a line of battle.

καὶ those who held Argos, καὶ high-walled Tiryns;



τε Hermione τε Asine, mutually touching the hem of the sea;

τε Troezen, τε Eiones, τε vine-rich Epidaurus;

and the Achaean youths that held Aegina καὶ Mases;

—all these Diomedes led alongside Sthenelus,

eminent Capaneus' much-loved son.

And a third came with them : godlike Euryalus,

son of King Mecisteus, son of Talaus.

Diomedes, he of the fierce war cry, held foremost command.

With them came eighty black ships.

καὶ those who held Mycenae, powerful city;

καὶ opulent Corinth, καὶ well-built Cleonae;

καὶ those who lived in Orneae; καὶ fair Araethyrea;

καὶ Sicyon; all those whose first king was Adrastus.

καὶ those who held Hyperesia, καὶ high Gonoessa

καὶ Pellene; and dwelt all over Aegium

τε Aegialus τε wide Helice.

With them came one hundred ships.

ἄρχων : son of Atreus, King Agamemnon.

With him followed many of the finest people.

Among them he put on his shining armour,

and went proudly along as the most distinguished

of the warriors, for he was the foremost man

and led the greatest number of people.

καὶ those who held the cavernous land of

Lacedaemon, split with many ravines;

τε Pharis, τε Sparta, τε Messe, where doves fly;

τε those who lived in Bryseae, τε beautiful Augeiae;

τε those who held Amyclae, τε Hele, the seaside city;

τε those who held Laas; and dwelt all over Oetylus.

These King Agamemnon's brother led as ἄρχων :  
 Menelaus, fierce with the battle cry.  
 Bringing sixty ships, he positioned them  
 apart from the rest. He himself moved among them,  
 trusting in his readiness, encouraging his men  
 into war. Above all, his heart burned for vengeance,  
 for all the bitterness and sorrow brought by Helen.

καὶ those who lived in Pylos, τε radiant Arene;  
 τε Thryon, famed river-passage to Alpheius;  
 τε Aepy; τε those who lived in Cyparisseis,  
 τε Amphigeneia, τε Pteleon τε Helos τε Dorion  
 —where the Muses ambushed Thamyras  
 the Thracian and extinguished his singing :  
 for while travelling from Eurytus of Oechalia  
 he boasted in bold declaration that he would prevail  
 even if the Muses themselves, daughters of Zeus, sang against him!  
 So in their rage they mutilated him.  
 They took away his divinely sweet song  
 and he abandoned poetry and the lyre.  
 With these as leader was the tamer of horses  
 from Gerenia : Nestor. And with him  
 came ninety hollow ships in ordered advance.

καὶ those who held Arcadia under the high peak  
 of Cyllene, by the tomb of Aepytus;  
 whose warriors fought up close and hand to hand;  
 καὶ those who lived in Pheneos, τε sheep-grazed Orchomenos;  
 τε Rhipe τε Stratia τε windy Enispe;  
 καὶ those who held Tegea, τε lovely Mantinea,  
 τε Stymphalos. καὶ those who lived in Parrhasia.

With them as leader was King Agapenor,  
 son of Ancaeus, who came with sixty ships.  
 On each ship were many Arcadian warriors  
 skilled in battle. King of men Agamemnon  
 had given them the well-made ships to travel  
 the wine-dark sea, the son of Atreus himself,  
 for they had no interest in affairs of water.

καὶ those who lived in δῖος Elis; τε Buprasium;  
 τε Hyrmine τε Myrsinos overlooking the sea;  
 καὶ all those by the rock of Olen τε Aleision.  
 With them were four ἄρχων bringing many Epeians :  
 ten black ships followed each leader.  
 Of the ten, some were led by Amphimachus  
 τε Thalpius, both of the line of maiden-stalking Actor :  
 the first, Cteatus' son; son of Eurytus, the other.  
 Of the ten, some were led by Amarynceus' son,  
 powerful Diore. And of the fourth command,  
 godlike Polyxeinus was ἄρχων, son of Agathenes,  
 son of Augeias.

καὶ those from Dulichium τε Echinae,  
 the holy islands that lie on the far side  
 of the sea, facing Elis. With them as leader  
 was the destructive Meges, son of Phyleus—  
 the horseman Phyleus beloved of Zeus  
 who withdrew to Dulichium in rage against  
 his father. And with Meges came forty black ships.

And Odysseus led the great-hearted Cephallenians,  
 who held Ithaca and Neritum, which quivers constantly

with leaves. καὶ those from Krocyleia, καὶ stony Aegilips;  
 τε those who held Zacynthos; τε those who dwelt around Sáme;  
 τε those who held the mainland, καὶ τε those who lived on the shores  
 opposite the islands. Of these was Odysseus ἄρχων ,  
 who in mind was as fertile as Zeus. And with Odysseus  
 came twelve ships painted red.

The Aetolians were led by Thoas, son of Andraemon.  
 τε those who lived in Pleuron, τε Olenus, τε Pylene,  
 τε Chalcis on the sea; καὶ rocky Calydon.  
 The sons of great-hearted Oeneus were all gone,  
 nor was he himself alive; and blond Meleager was dead,  
 who'd been given sovereignty over the Aetolians.  
 And with Thoas came forty black ships.

τε came Idomeneus from Crete as ἄρχων ,  
 those who held Cnossos and high-walled Gortys;  
 τε Lyctus τε Miletus τε Lycastus, all gleaming white  
 from their high chalk cliffs; καὶ Phaestos τε Rhytium,  
 populous cities; and all the other places  
 on the island of the hundred cities.  
 Of all these was Idomeneus, famous spearman, ἄρχων ;  
 also Meriones, equal in fury to man-killing Enyalios.

Tlepolemus, son of Heracles, good and brave and strong,  
 led nine ships from imperial Rhodes, warriors from cities  
 Lindos τε Ialysos τε Camirus, built on the white chalk.  
 Tlepolemus was ἄρχων . Renowned in war, he was born  
 to Heracles by Astyoche, whom he'd taken from Ephyre  
 by the river Selleis, when he'd conquered many cities  
 of warriors beloved of Zeus. When Tlepolemus

grew up, in a high-rising palace, he murdered his uncle  
 —Licymnius, once heir to Ἴδης, but by then an old man.  
 So Tlepolemus built ships, and gathered many people,  
 and fled away over the sea, leaving the constant menace  
 of the numerous sons and grandsons of βῆρ Heracles.  
 Thus he came to Rhodes after prolonged and painful wandering.  
 There, the people settled by tribes into three communities;  
 and were loved by Zeus, king of gods and men,  
 who showered them with magnificent wealth.

Nireus, now, led three pretty ships from Syme.  
 Nireus, son of Aglaïa and King Charops.  
 Nireus, the most beautiful of Danaans  
 to come to Troy, after excellent Achilles.  
 But he was weak, and few followed him.

καὶ those who held Nisyros, καὶ Carpathos, καὶ Casos καὶ Cos;  
 τε city of Eurypylus; τε the Calydnian islands.  
 These were led by Pheidippus τε Antiphus,  
 the sons of King Thessalus, son of Heracles.  
 And with them came thirty hollow ships.

Now all those who lived in Pelasgian Argos;  
 in Alos, τε Alope, τε Trachis; and who held  
 Phthia, τε Hellas καλλι-γύναικα  
 (oasis of beautiful women) :  
 all those called Myrmidons, and Hellenes, and Achaeans :  
 they came in fifty ships with ἄρχων Achilles.  
 Yet not a one of them thought of clangorous war,  
 for no one ordered them into formation.  
 He lay there languorous among his ships,

quick-footed δῖος Achilles,  
 breathing rage over Briseïs—gorgeous girl  
 whom he'd carried out of Lyrnessus only  
 after great struggle, when the city was finally  
 obliterated along with the walls of Thebe.  
 He'd cut down warriors Mynes and Epistrophus,  
 sons of King Evenus, Selepius' son,  
 but only after heated contention with the spear.  
 So now he lay idle, grieving over her loss.  
 Soon he would rise.

καὶ those who held Phylace; τε Pyrasus, full of flowers;  
 τε the holy ground of Demeter, who freely gives us gifts  
 up from the soil; τε Iton, where many sheep nibble;  
 τε Antron by the sea; τε Pteleos, of broad meadowlands.  
 With them as leader was Ἴαρος-like Protesilaus,  
 while he lived. Now the black earth holds him forever.  
 And the two tender cheeks of his new-wedded wife  
 were torn open with her fingernails from grief.  
 She, Laodamia, was left in Phylace in a house but half-  
 built. But he was the first of the Achaeans to leap  
 from the ships and charge the Trojan shore : and a Dardanian  
 warrior killed him in the surf that washed his footprints away.  
 And though his men missed their ἀρχόν , they needed someone to lead;  
 and Podarces, an heir to Ἴαρος , maintained order.  
 He was son of Iphiclus, prosperous with sheep; and grandson  
 of Phylacus; and the very brother of courageous, great-  
 hearted Protesilaus. But Podarces was the younger  
 of the two, and the older was the better and the stronger  
 man : hero Protesilaus. So while an ἀρχόν had come,  
 all grieved for the excellent one that was lost.

They came in forty black ships.

τε those who lived in Pherae, by the holy lake Boebeïs,  
in which, they say, goddess Athena once bathed her feet;  
τε in Boebe τε Glaphyrae τε high-rising lolcus.

These came in eleven ships led by Eumelus,  
much-loved son of King Admetus. His mother was Alcestis,  
most beautiful of the daughters of Pelias.

καὶ those who lived in Methone καὶ Thaumakie;  
καὶ those who held Meliboea καὶ rocky Olizon.

They came in seven ships led by master archer  
Philoctetes; each ship advancing by the effort  
of fifty rowers experienced in handling the bow  
in battle. But Philoctetes was now left behind  
on the island of most holy Lemnos,  
suffering terribly with a bleeding wound  
delivered by a deadly-minded water-snake.  
Watching him writhing in anguish, the sons of the Achaeans  
had gone away and onward. There he lay in monstrous pain.  
One day soon the Argives by their ships would come to remember  
Philoctetes. And though his men missed their ἀρχόν ,  
they needed someone to lead. Medon brought order,  
whom Oïleus fathered with glowing nymph Rhene :  
another bastard son of Oïleus, wrecker of cities.

καὶ those who held Tricca καὶ stony Ithome;  
καὶ Oechalia, city of Eurytus of Oechalia.  
τε ἄρχων were the two sons of Asclepios,  
the great healers Podaleirius τε Machaon.  
With them came thirty black ships.

τε those who held Ormenius and the Hypereian spring,  
 bathing-place of goddesses; τε Asterium;  
 τε Titanus—warriors in white-plumed helmets of dogskin.  
 Eurypylus led them, shining son of Euaemon.  
 With him came forty black ships.

καὶ those who held Argissa. καὶ those who raised homes  
 in Gyrtona, τε Orthe, τε Elone, τε bright city of Oloösön.  
 All these Polypoetes led as ἄρχων : he-who-holds-his-ground,  
 son of Peirithous, a son of Zeus. On the very day  
 he brought vengeance on the hairy centaurs,  
 forcing them out of Pelion and driving them to the tribe  
 of Aethices, he lay with the splendid Hippodameia  
 and conceived Polypoetes. With him came Leonteus,  
 an heir to Ἄρης , son of lively-spirited Coronus,  
 son of Caenus, who was both man and woman.  
 With them came forty black ships.

From Cyphus came Gouneus with twenty-two ships.  
 With him came Enienes τε Peraebi,  
 hard to vanquish. They lived around cold Dodona,  
 and the quiet fields of river Titarisios,  
 whose beautifully clear waters run in with  
 the river Pineios, yet does not mingle with  
 the river Pineios and its silvery rushing waters,  
 but flows through and onward, smooth as olive oil :  
 for the river Pineios is a branch of the Styx :  
 the dread oncoming of death, which no one escapes.

And the Magnetes had as ἄρχων Prothous,



Tenthredon' son. These lived around the Pineios  
 τε Pelion, which quivers constantly with leaves.  
 And they were led by the quick-moving Prothous.  
 With him came forty black ships.

These were the kings and leaders of the Danaans.  
 But of all of these warriors, tell me, Muse,  
 who was the best? The best of the horses,  
 and the best of men, who followed Agamemnon?

Of the horses, far the finest were from Pherae,  
 the mares of King Admetus, son of Pheres;  
 and Eumelas drove them as fast as birds fly :  
 perfectly matched in age, in coat, and in height.  
 Silver-arrowed Apollo had reared them in Pereia;  
 and with them they brought fury into battle.

Of the men, far the finest was Telamonian Ajax—  
 while δῖος Achilles brooded in rage. Achilles was far  
 the best of them. His horses, too, were excellent.  
 But just now he sat by his pointed sea-crossing ships,  
 burning in rage at Agamemnon, leader of the people.  
 So his men amused themselves by the seashore,  
 throwing the discus, and aiming the javelin,  
 and engaging in the fine art of archery.  
 And his horses stood, each by their own chariot,  
 grazing on the clover and wild celery  
 covering the marshy ground. And the chariots  
 stood covered up. So his men, waiting for their ἀρχὸν  
 to stand, roamed here and there up and down the camp,  
 away from the fighting.

So they advanced like a groundswell of fire,  
 and the earth trembled under them, as under Zeus  
 High Endless Thunderer, who lashes the country  
 round Typhoeus in the land of the Arimi—  
 it's said you'll find there the bed of Typhoeus.  
 In like manner the ground rumbled as they moved across the plain.

And a rainbow brightened the sky :  
 Swift Iris, who walks with the wind, came down  
 with a word from Zeus Orderer—unpleasant news for Trojans.

As she swooped in, the Trojans were together,  
 speaking in assembly at Priam's palace gates,  
 a gathering of both young men and the elders.

And Iris appeared in shape and voice of a son  
 of Priam's : Polites, who was a quick-footed  
 watchman who sat atop the ancient tomb  
 of Aesyetes, waiting for any Achaeans  
 to come from their ships. Now she spoke as he :

"Most worthy sir, you speak on and on  
 as if we're at peace. But war is coming!  
 It's not on the way—it's here! I've faced many  
 warriors in combat before now, but  
 I've yet to see an army like this one.  
 It's like looking at the leaves, or the sands  
 by the sea. They're marching over the plain,  
 right now, to annihilate our city!

Hector—I speak to you directly : hear my word.  
All through our huge city of Priam there are men  
of foreign speech from all over the earth,  
one after another. So let this follow from that :  
command each to give the sign to the men  
under his leadership, and lead them out  
of the city, and in ordered array.”

So spoke Iris.

And Hector alone saw the aura of the goddess,  
and knew those words were hers. So at once he dismissed  
the assembly, and all rushed to arm themselves.

All the gates were opened, and the people streamed out,  
both foot-forces and charioteers, raising thunderous sound.

Now, outside the city walls, standing alone  
out in the plain, with grass growing all round,  
was a mound of earth, high and steep, which the people  
called Bateia, but the immortals knew it  
as the tomb of the far-springing Amazon queen Myrine.  
Here the Trojans and their allies composed  
themselves into companies, combining forces.

Great Hector in glinting helmet led the Trojans,  
the first-born of Priam’s full many sons;  
and they were greater in number by far,  
and they were eager to transfix the spear.

The Trojans of the district of Dardania

had Aeneas as leader, son of Anchises,  
 whom Aphrodite lay with on the ridges  
 of Ida; goddess conceiving with mortal man,  
 mother of noble Aeneas. He was not alone.  
 With him were the two sons of Antenor,  
 Archelochus and Acamas, both expert in war.

And those who lived in the deepest valleys of Ida,  
 prosperous men who drank dark Aesepian water,  
 the Troes, who were led by the excellent son  
 of Lycaon, Pandaros, whose skill with the bow  
 was taught him by Apollo.

And those who held Adrasteia, and the land  
 of Apaesos; and who held Pityeia; and the high  
 mountain of Tereia. These were led by Adrastus  
 and Amphius, whose breast-plate was of linen,  
 the two sons of Merops of Perkote,  
 who was well-skilled in the visionary  
 art of divination, and would not have  
 his sons march off into slaughterous war.  
 But his sons did not obey him, for the fates  
 were leading them into a dark death.

And those who lived in Perkote and Praktius,  
 and who held Sestos and Abydos, and lovely  
 Arisbe. These were led by Hyrtacus' son  
 Asius, a teacher of men : Asius,  
 who brought sleek horses from the river Selleïs,  
 in lovely Arisbe.

And Hippothous, who led the Pelasgian tribes  
of spearmen, those who lived in fertile Larissa.  
With him was Pylaeus, an heir to Ares,  
and both were sons of Lethus, son of Teutamus,  
of the Pelasgi.

Acamas and warrior Peiroös led the Thracians,  
all those from over the strong-flowing Hellespont.

Euphemus led the Ciconian spearmen,  
son of Troezenus and grandson of Ceos,  
beloved of Zeus.

Pyraechmes led the heavily-armed Paeonians  
from far off Amydon by the river Axius :  
Axius, the clearest, brightest water on earth.

Pylaemenes of the gruff heart led the Paphlagonians  
from Eneti, where a wondrous race of half-asses  
ran wild. These people held Cytorus, and lived  
around Sesamon, and had houses by the river  
Parthenius, and Cromna, and Aegialus,  
and high-reaching Erythini.

And Odius and Epistrophus led the Halizones  
from far away Alybe, where men first found silver.

Chromios led the Mysians with Ennomus,  
who read the flight of birds. But all his prophetic  
reading didn't save him from a dark fate.  
He was killed by quick-moving Aeacus

in the river, alongside other of Aeacus' victims.

Phorcys and godlike Ascanius led the Phrygians  
from far off Ascania, and both eagerly awaited  
combat.

Mesthles and Antiphos led the Maeonians,  
the two sons of Talaemenes, whose mother  
was the Gygaean lake. They brought the Maeonians  
from their dwellings at the foot of Mount Tmolus.

And Nastes led the Carians βαρβαρόφωνος—speaking  
a simple tongue—who held Miletus, and Phthires,  
the mountain with foliage denser to a smoothness,  
and the river Maeander, and the steep heights of Mycale.  
With him was Amphimachus. Chiefs Nastes and Amphimachus,  
the illustrious children of Nomion. This Nastes came  
into battle wearing golden ornaments like a silly girl;  
but all that gold brought no defense from a miserable death.  
He was killed in the river by quick-moving Aeacus,  
and Achilles carried off the gold.

Sarpedon led the Lycians with the incomparable  
Glaucus, from far away Lycia, where river Xanthus swirls.

End of Book II

## Book III

When the Trojan army stood in ordered array  
by their leaders, with a word they rushed forward  
like voracious birds shrieking and screaming,  
as cranes, a wintery omen, fleeing thunderstorms  
and pelting rain, rise in the sky before heaven,  
and with noisy skirr fly towards Oceanus  
and bring ruin and death to the little men  
by the streams, when they swoop in at rosy  
dawn, despoiling and devouring.

But the Achaeans advanced coolly, in silence,  
breathing fury, each keen to defend the next.

As when upon the mountain peaks the South Wind pours down a mist,  
unpleasant for the shepherd, but for the thief an opportunity  
better than blackest night, for ranged flocks can be easily plucked :  
and a man sees ahead only so far as a stone can reach :

in this way, from beneath their feet, rose a cloud of dust swirling  
and dense, while they marched over the plain.

When the two armies were near to one another,  
out walked from the Trojans godlike Alexandros,  
known also as Paris. In place of shield he held  
a panther-skin draped over a shoulder. Draped  
also upon him were his curved bow and sword;  
and with a sharp-tipped spear in each hand he challenged  
the Achaean army to send forth its best,  
to fight face to face in rageful combat.

The eyes of Menelaus narrowed at the sight of Paris,  
approaching with long, confident strides,

even as a lion is pleased to find an antlered deer  
or wild goat, dead on the ground, when he's hungry;  
and he devours it eagerly, though hounds and hunters  
approach : just so was Menelaus pleased to see Paris,  
for vengeance saw the sinner. From his chariot, then,  
in his armour, he sprang to the ground.

The eyes of Paris widened at the sight of Menelaus,  
and suddenly he stood in shame before both armies.  
So he withdrew back into the crowd of his ranks,  
postponing fate. Like a man who sees a snake  
and leaps back, in the deep of a mountain ravine,  
and quivering in body steps away with pale face :  
in just this way did godlike Alexandros retreat;  
abashed, for the moment, and therefore weakened,  
for the moment, and so he feared Menelaus.  
So he sank back into the crowd of the courageous Trojans.

Hector watched his royal brother's shameful retreat.  
So he reproved the other with hard words :

"Paris!" he said. "Of the good and the bad!  
A beautiful-looking, woman-crazy fraud.  
You . . . ! It would have gone quieter with us  
if you'd gone unborn. Or at least lie down  
only once, on long death's eternal day.  
Rather than take the looks of men



who eye disgrace and lower their heads in disgust.  
 These long-hairs laugh at us. They think we've just sent forth  
 our first among us, for your outward beauty claims so.  
 And just now their thoughts are clear for us to hear :  
 'This pretty one had the daring to take our woman?'

Paris, where's the strength and courage you had  
 when you crossed over the sea with your friends  
 and carried away back with you a beautiful  
 woman, only the sister-in-law of King Agamemnon,  
 who, as you can see, has friends of his own,  
 who love the spear. And now you know what you brought back :  
 misery. Misery for your father, and for all of us.  
 And mockery from your enemies; and humiliation  
 to yourself. Why is your head not lowered in shame  
 before me? When you were there over the sea,  
 was it then you had the strength to face Menelaus?  
 Then, you would have come to know the sort of man  
 blessed with such loveliness in a wife.  
 Now, however, your lyre offers you no defence.  
 Not a one of those gifts of Aphrodite will help you  
 —that fairly arranged hair, that famously handsome face—  
 when you come to lie in the dust.

And truly I think

the Trojan people are wondrous cowards,  
 or plain lazy. For all the wrongs you've done to them  
 they should have thrown around you a tomb of stone."

And ( θεο-ειδής ) "godlike" Alexandros answered him :

“Your reproach is just, Hector. And as straightforward as always.  
Always your heart comes on like the axe driven through the timber,  
contriving to cut away and artfully shape.

As for those ‘gifts of Aphrodite’, what makes you  
so incensed with the thought of them? In deploring  
my beauty you thereby taunt the gods, who give us  
such things, and no one would willingly refuse them.

Well then. Let’s get on with making war, then, correct?  
Sit the Trojans down, and the Achaeans,  
and set me with this Ἄρης-loving Menelaus  
in the middle, and we’ll fight for Helen,  
and everything that’s hers. He who proves the superior man,  
let him take all the woman home.

Everyone else here swear oaths of friendship,  
with sacrifice. And Troy lives here, on its deep soil;  
and they go back to Argos and breed their horses,  
and to Achaea καλλιγύναικα .”

So he spoke, and Hector approved his words,  
and walked out into the wide empty space  
separating the opposing armies.

Then he faced the battle lines of his Trojans,  
and he raised up his spear, setting it even  
with the ground by holding it at its middle :  
and his army saw this, and they all sat down.

Meanwhile, the Achaeans were bending their bows  
at him, aiming their arrows tight from head to foot;

and many had stones ready to shower at him.

But Agamemnon shouted, his voice carrying far :

“Hold, Argives! Youths of the Achaeans! No striking!  
Hector of the glinting helmet prepares to speak to us!”

He said this, and all his army loosened their tightening hands,  
and stood in silence. And Hector spoke to both armies :

“Hear me, Trojans,” he said, “and all well-bronzed Achaeans,  
the words of Alexandros, he who inspired this contention!  
He proposes that Trojans and Achaeans put down their weapons  
onto the earth! He himself will come here into the centre,  
and meet Menelaus, he-who-is-dear-to-Ἄρης , alone  
in battle, for Helen and all her wealth!  
He who proves the superior man shall take all the woman home!  
But for all the others here, let us all swear oaths of friendship!”

So he spoke, and all there stood in icy silence.

Then Menelaus spoke :

“Hear my words now!” he said. “It is to me these troubles have come!  
The mind of youth turns with every wind, but the older sees both  
ahead and behind, so all may be rendered best in the present!  
—For both sides! I say let the Argives and the Trojans stand down!  
Let us stop before they happen all the many evils provoked  
by the beginning that Alexandros made! Let us conclude  
a treaty! We shall bring before us one black lamb and one white lamb,  
and Priam himself shall stand with us when we sacrifice a third

to Highest Zeus! As for my argument with Alexandros :  
 we two shall meet in the centre, and which of us death and fate  
 awaits shall lie dead on the ground!”

So went the voice of Menelaus out to the two armies,  
 and the Achaeans and the Trojans were content to be free  
 from miserable war.

So both withdrew their chariots from formation,  
 stepped down, and stripped off their armour. Each placed  
 his bronze on the dirt close-by : and the weapons  
 of both armies covered the quiet earth.

Hector sent two ministers into the city  
 to bring the two lambs, and to summon King Priam.

And Talthybius was sent by Agamemnon  
 to the ships, to bring back a lamb; and he did not  
 disobey δῖος Agamemnon.

And Iris came to slender-armed Helen,  
 and Helen saw her as one of the sisters  
 in a palace of many sons : Laodice,  
 the most beautiful of Priam’s many daughters.

Helen was in her inner chamber,  
 weaving a garment on her loom, a large  
 purple cloak meant to be folded double,  
 and she was skilfully threading in colours,  
 embroidering memories of battles  
 between fiery Trojan and bronze Achaean.

And stepping close to her came swift-footed Iris :

“Come now, dear child, let me show you wonderful  
sights of fiery Trojan and bronze Achaean,  
who, till just now, have been fighting one another,  
eager for glory and annihilation, warring on the plain :  
but now they stand idle, in silence, and stop their war,  
each leaning on his shield, each spear-handle stuck in  
the dirt hard-by. Alexandros and Menelaus  
intend to fight up close for you, one against one;  
whoever conquers, you shall be called his wife!”

So the goddess spoke, and nested a longing  
in her heart to see her former man, and city,  
and parents. Straightaway she veiled her face  
in fine shining linen, and left her chamber,  
dropping round, swelling tears. And two handmaids  
followed her as she went : Aethra, and Clymene  
of the striking eyes. And quickly they came  
to the Scaean gate, the main entryway of Troy.

And the elders of the people sat on the tower  
above the Scaean gate. Those around King Priam  
were Panthous and Thymoetes; and three brothers  
to the aged king : Lampus and Clytius and Hicetaon,  
an heir to Ἄρης , long ago. Also Ucalegon  
and Antenor, discreet men of wisdom.  
Old age had taken them off the active  
battlefield of arms, but active speakers  
they were, even exceptional, as cicadas

in the forest send out their voice as delicate  
 as the colour of the lily. Such were they who sat,  
 and when they saw Helen approaching towards the Wall,  
 murmurously they discussed her under their breath :

“Full wondrous is that beauty!” they said. “No wonder  
 the Trojans and those bronze-armoured ones  
 would suffer so much for a woman so marvellous  
 to look upon! Delicate, exceedingly so,  
 as of a goddess immortal coming before our eyes.

Still, she’s got to go. Put her on their ships  
 and get her back to her house. For us, and for  
 the children after us, there will be senseless trouble  
 if she remains.”

All these things they spoke quietly among themselves,  
 while Priam called out to Helen, to come to him :

“Come here, dear child, and sit by me, and see  
 your former man, and family, and friends.  
 Dear Helen, you are blameless in my eyes.  
 It is the gods—destiny—who brought Ἄρησ  
 of many tears to me, this war with the Achaeans.

Tell me now, by what name goes that wondrous-  
 sized warrior whom I see? This Achaean man,  
 clearly a distinguished hero? I’ve seen taller men  
 by a head, but so handsome a man I’ve never seen  
 with these eyes, nor one with such noble distinction.  
 That man is a king.”

And Helen, δῖος woman, answered him :

“O honoured one, very-much-loved one, I even  
call you, with my husband, ‘father’; and one I dread :  
when I left my daughter, my brothers, my parents,  
all my friends, and left behind my lovely house,  
and came here with your son, death did not follow;  
it was not to be. So I pour out all my heart  
in tears. But he you ask of is Agamemnon,  
both a good king and a mighty warrior.  
He is also my former husband’s brother—  
if I didn’t dream that part of my life.”

So Helen spoke, and the old man sat admiring,  
and said :

“Ah, the fortunate son of Atreus! Born under  
an auspicious star, and blessed by the gods!  
And I see how many follow him, all these young Achaeans.  
Long ago I went to Phrygia-of-the-vines  
and saw many warriors there on the nimblest horses,  
the people of Kings Otreus and astonishing Mygdon,  
assembled in a camp by the banks of the Sangarius.  
I was numbered among their allies on the day  
the Amazons came, terrible as men.  
But they weren’t as many as these bright-bronzed Achaeans.”

The old man then saw Odysseus, and he asked her :

“Come now! dear child, tell me of that man.

Shorter by a head than Agamemnon,  
 yet broader in shoulders and chest. His armour  
 lies on the ground, yet as he walks the lines,  
 reviewing his warriors, with a word to this,  
 and a touch to that, he brings to my mind  
 a thick-fleeced ram commanding the white flock.”

Helen, daughter of Zeus, answered him :

“That is Laertes’ son, Odysseus πολύμητις ,  
 from island Ithaca. From a rocky place came  
 a very smooth man : he has all kinds of cunning about him.”

Then wise counsellor Antenor answered Helen :

“Lady, you speak true. Some time ago δῖος  
 Odysseus came to us on embassy,  
 concerning you, together with Ἄρης-loving  
 Menelaus. I welcomed them as guests  
 in my halls, and gave them a fine reception.  
 I learned then of his presence, and of his mind :  
 that commanding physique and his crafty thinking.

When they first made their appearance among  
 the assembly of Trojans, and stood before us,  
 Menelaus’ broad shoulders overdominated his;  
 but when they sat, Odysseus sat more nobly.

And when Menelaus spoke among us,  
 he wove an easy eloquence, one of few words—  
 he was no rambling speaker. (And that man



was the younger of the two!)

So then commanding Odysseus stood to speak.  
 But the πολύμητις seemed irritated—  
 he kept fixing his eyes downward before he spoke,  
 and held the sceptre as if it were a trifle,  
 without dignity; so we thought him witless.  
 You, lady, would have scorned his disagreeableness,  
 and thought him a fool. But when he did speak,  
 the words he sent out with impressive voice  
 were like exquisite snowflakes on a winter day.  
 We knew then that no man can outdo Odysseus in speech.  
 And we ceased to observe the way he stood there.”

The old king then saw Ajax, and asked Helen :

“And this other Achaean, prominent over  
 all the rest, with that noble look, and broad shoulders :  
 who is he?”

And Helen, δῖος woman in long-flowing robe, answered him :

“That is Ajax, a tremendous defence for the Achaeans.  
 Next to him, equally godly to me, is Idomeneus,  
 standing with the leaders from Crete. Menelaus  
 and I entertained him in our house many times,  
 whenever he came to our city from Crete.  
 Now I see many a man I recognize,  
 and could speak of, and tell you their names;  
 but two men I do not see, though I look closely.  
 Castor and Polydeuces : my darling brothers,

from one and the same mother. Castor is known  
 as 'tamer of horses', while Polydeuces  
 is our best and most celebrated boxer.  
 Perhaps they stayed at home, humiliated by their sister.  
 Or maybe they've come from Lacedaemon on their ships  
 and joined up with this, but stay out of the way,  
 caring not for the mockery and embarrassment  
 of being brothers to me."

So spoke Helen, unaware that her brothers  
 were already buried in the life-giving soil,  
 there in Lacedaemon, in their homeland.

The tombs of the Dioscuri would be a place  
 of pilgrimage for millennia to come.

Meanwhile, Priam's ministers, including  
 Idaeus, his personal attendant, had brought  
 up from the city the two lambs required  
 for the oaths of faith; also, in a goat-skin flask,  
 the fiery wine that comes up from the soil  
 and brings cheer. And Idaeus himself held  
 the mixing bowl glowing bright as the day,  
 and splendid golden drinking cups. He leaned  
 in towards old King Priam so he could say :

"Most worthy king, son of Laomedon,  
 rise, and hear the summons from the Trojans  
 and the armoured Achaeans, to come down  
 to the plain, there to make sincere oaths of friendship,  
 ratified with sacrifice. It has been decided :

Alexandros and Menelaus will face off  
 with spears for the woman, and he who prevails  
 wins her, with all her wealth. As for the rest of us,  
 we pledge everlasting friendship, with sacrifice,  
 and we live on here in excellent Troy,  
 and they go back to Argos, and to Achaea  
 καλλιγύναικα.”

So he spoke, and old King Priam winced at the thought  
 of his son up close in battle with Menelaus.  
 Still, he directed his attendants to yoke up  
 the horses, and they readily obeyed.  
 And Priam came down from the tower.

At the foot of the gate, the king mounted  
 his chariot and seized the reins, while  
 Antenor stepped up beside him; and in  
 the exquisitely ornamented chariot  
 they led the swift-footed horses out of the gate,  
 and onto the plain.

Thus the king went to the Trojans and Achaeans.

When he came to the two armies, he stepped  
 from his chariot to the quiet-growing earth,  
 and walked into the gap between all the men,  
 and came to stand between the Trojans and Achaeans.

Promptly Agamemnon and Odysseus πολύμητις  
 entered the gap; and also the royal ministers, bringing  
 the victims for the oaths of fidelity. They mixed the wine;

and poured purifying water over the hands of the kings.  
 And the son of Atreus drew his razor-sharp dagger ever  
 fixed beside his sword-sheath, and cut wool off from the lambs' heads;  
 and the ministers doled out equal portions to the noblest  
 of the Achaeans and the Trojans.

Then Agamemnon raised up his hands in prayer :

"Zeus Father," he said, "strongest and greatest,  
 ordering all from the summit of Ida;  
 and you, Sun, who oversees and overhears all;  
 and the rivers; and Earth; and whoever beneath  
 us punishes those who speak treacherously here,  
 once they've gone below, when finished with work.  
 Witness us now, and keep watch on our faith hereafter.

If Alexandros kills Menelaus, let him  
 then take the hand of Helen and hold all her wealth,  
 and we'll go home in our ships. If Menelaus  
 kills Alexandros, then the Trojans allow Helen  
 to leave with us, with all her wealth; moreover  
 the Trojans must make us requital in payment,  
 such that those yet to come will deem it reasonable.  
 But if Priam and the sons of Priam refuse this,  
 if Alexandros falls, then we will stay here  
 on the spot and fight until we are satisfied."

Thus spoke Agamemnon, and cut the throats  
 of the lambs with the heartless bronze : then laid  
 them down on the earth, gasping and quivering,  
 breathing out the last of their lives, for the bronze

had cut away their spirit. Then they drew wine  
from the mixing-bowl, and poured out in prayer  
to the gods everlasting.

And from the armies one and another man spoke out :

“Zeus Greatest and Highest! All the immortal gods!  
Whoever first undoes this oath shall have their brains  
broken on the ground just as that wine flows—  
theirs, and their children’s, too; and may their wives  
be handed over to others as slaves!”

So they spoke, but not yet did Zeus bring any of this to be.

Then Priam spoke out :

“Hear me, all Trojans, and you well-bronzed Achaeans!  
I shall now return to the city, as my eyes  
can not suffer to see my son fight Menelaus.  
Let Zeus and the other immortals stand patient  
in the knowledge of what is destined to be.  
Such knowledge I shall not wait to be given me.”

And so Priam had the two lambs placed down  
gently in his chariot-box, then stepped in,  
the godlike man. He gathered the reins tight  
and roused his horses just as Antenor came up  
beside him; and the very beautiful chariot  
brought them back to the city.

Hector and Odysseus measured out a space.

Then they took two stones and dropped them in the bronze helmet.  
 They would draw to see which of the two would take up  
 the bronze-tipped spear and let fly first.

And all the people raised their hands in prayer to the gods, saying :

“Zeus Father who rules from Ida, most honoured god,  
 greatest god, whoever is the guilty one here,  
 let him die, and go down to the House of Hades;  
 and for the rest of us, bring friendship and trust!”

So they spoke, as Hector shook the glinting helmet,  
 averting his head as he did so : then he tipped it :  
 and Paris’ stone came out onto the dirt.

At that, both armies sat down in their lines,  
 where the horses pawed the earth restlessly,  
 and where their bright armour lay.

δῖος Alexandros put on his intricate  
 inlaid armour, beautiful Helen’s man.  
 First he armoured his legs with bent metal plates,  
 its ankle-pieces connected by silver clasps  
 that sparkled. Next, he got into his coat  
 of armour, that Lycaon, his brother, lent him,  
 and tightened all the fastenings. Round his shoulders  
 he hung his sharp sword with silver-ornamented  
 handle; and after that his shield, grand and solid.  
 Then on his head he fitted his well-made helmet,  
 crested with horsehair dyed of terrible colours.  
 Fearsomely the crest nodded from above;

and he took into his grip a powerful spear.

In like manner did Menelaus get into his armour.

When both stood suited for battle, each on his side,  
glaring at each other from across the empty gap,  
then, slowly, with menacing tread, they entered  
into the spot between the Trojans and Achaeans,  
keeping each other's gaze as they went. And  
both armies looked on breathlessly as the two men  
came to stand within the space measured off for them,  
their bronze-tipped spears chafing at the air with fury.

In the hot sun those spears cast long shadows on the dirt.

First Alexandros flung his spear, and as it hit  
the strong round shield of Menelaus, its tip bent  
sidewise, and the limp spear dropped to the dirt.

Next Menelaus moved forward with bronze in hand,  
and prayed :

"Zeus Punisher, give me vengeance on him  
who first did me wrong, 'δῖος' Alexandros,  
and give him death with these hands, so that those  
yet to be born will hear of this, and tremble  
to do evil."

As he spoke he aimed his spear, drew back, and flung it  
at the well-balanced shield of Priam's son. Through it  
ripped the shining tip of his spear, which pushed straight through

his intricately inlaid breast-plate and cut through  
his tunic and touched a soft spot between his ribs  
and hip : but he spun away and avoided death.

Menelaus rushed forward, unsheathing his sword,  
and struck him hard on the crest of his helmet :  
and his sword shattered into four fragments  
and Menelaus flung the useless handle away.

And Menelaus shouted out savagely : “Father Zeus!”

And he rushed at him and grabbed his horsehair plume tight  
in his grip, and whirled him round in sight of all,  
and he thought, “Most unrelenting destructive god!  
Revenge was mine on the vile Alexandros,  
but my spear went awry and my sword shattered  
in my hand! I have not killed him!”

He began to drag him towards the Achaean ranks,  
holding him by his ornamented helmet,  
and its well-stitched leather strap, buckled tight,  
slipped down and around his soft throat,  
and was now strangling Alexandros  
as he was dragged through the dust.

Menelaus was walking towards spectacular glory—

until Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus, a sharp-sighted beauty,  
let the leather strap snap apart; and Menelaus was left  
with an empty helmet in his hand. This the Achaean hero  
flung with an angry whirl over the heads of his bronze army;



and the soldiers collected it and took it away.

Menelaus, breathing hard, was ready to kill,  
but he faced empty air; for Aphrodite had snatched away  
Alexandros (for what can't gods do?) and lowered him  
down lightly in his sweet-scented bedchamber.  
And she went off to fetch Helen.

And found her atop the great wall that surrounded  
the city, standing in a crowd of Trojan women  
admiring her.

And an old woman of many years stepped up close  
to Helen, and took hold of her robe, its fine fabric  
infused with sweet-scented perfume, and shook it :  
and Helen turned to greet a wizened face looking  
up at her, and she recognized the old woman  
as someone she loved. Back in Lacedaemon,  
when Helen had handled the loom, this woman  
had smoothed the fine wool skilfully for her.

And in this image δῖος Aphrodite called her by name :

"Come now," she said to Helen. "Alexandros  
summons you home. He awaits you in his chamber,  
lying on his sumptuous bed within the curtains,  
glowing with beauty, and splendid in his garments.  
No one would think him just stepped from a battlefield;  
a dance, more like : a young man off to the dance;  
or, content with the dance, now sitting at rest."

So spoke Aphrodite, and roused Helen's heart  
in her breast to wonder and anger both.

She was in two minds as she faced her old friend.  
She saw through to the goddess' delicate throat,  
and her shapely womanhood, and striking eyes :  
and Aphrodite astonished her : yet she was angry, too :

"Goddess Heaven-sent!" she said. "Why would you trifle  
with me this way? Maybe you're minded to lead me  
further on, to Phrygia or Maeonia,  
to the next place, and there love the next charming man?  
I know what's happened. Menelaus has cut him down  
and sent him humiliated to Hades' house,  
and now wants me back. He wants my hateful self back  
with him in Argos. This is why you come tricky-  
minded to me. You go to him. Withdraw from the way  
of the gods and leave Olympus forever,  
and live with him to suffer his concerns,  
and watch over him, until you're man and wife :  
or you become his slave. But I? I shall not go.  
No longer will I ornament his bed.  
The good women of Troy would scorn me afterward.  
Ah! My troubles are confused and endless!"

And heavenly Aphrodite was incensed, and said :

"Silly woman, why anger me? and have me abandon you?  
And have me hate you, as much as I now love you?  
I can make things miserable for you,  
for the Trojans, and for Danaans alike :

and then you would suffer a terrible death.”

Thus spoke Aphrodite, and Helen recoiled,  
terrified. So she went, wrapping her fine clinging  
linen around her, leaving unseen, in silence,  
and none of the Trojan women saw :  
and Aphrodite led the way.

Inside the glittering palace of Alexandros  
the handmaidens plied their domestic tasks.  
Helen, meanwhile, went up into the vaulted  
bedchamber. And Aphrodite of many smiles  
set a chair down for Helen to sit on, facing  
Alexandros. She sat down, the daughter of Zeus,  
with eyes raised skyward, and spoke out harshly :

“You creep away from war? You should have been  
killed on the spot—by my former husband,  
a more powerful man, Menelaus,  
whom you in times past reduced with cruel words,  
and declared yourself supreme in strength and bravery!

Well then! Go back now and challenge Menelaus  
to fight face to face—though I call that ill-advised!  
Do not be senseless enough to fight warlike Menelaus.  
He would bring you down.”

And Paris answered her :

“Gentle lady! No more punishment with hard words,  
I beg you! Just now Menelaus has the edge,

thanks to Athena. I'll kill him soon enough :  
 we have gods on our side, too. So come :  
 let us lie together, as two lovers in love.  
 Never has this desire burned so strong in me.  
 Not when I plucked you from charming Lacedaemon,  
 not when I took you away to sail the sea  
 in my ships, not there on island Cranae where we  
 lay together in a lover's bed—no, just now  
 overwhelmingly I must have you."

So he brought Helen forward to the bed,  
 and they went through its curtains and lay down.

Meanwhile, Agamemnon stalked the Trojan  
 lines to and fro, a beast of prey on the lookout  
 for δῖος Alexandros; but no man—Trojan,  
 or any one of their illustrious allies—  
 could deliver Alexandros to warlike Menelaus.  
 And they were not hiding him in the great heap  
 of the army out of love, for he was universally  
 hated, as they hated death.

Then king of men Agamemnon spoke out to all :

"Hear me now! Trojans! and Dardanians! and allies!  
 Warrior Menelaus, we see, takes victory!  
 So bring us Helen! and we shall take her  
 and all her wealth! And you must understand  
 our taxing troubles demand requital!  
 Such that those yet to come will deem it reasonable!"

Thus spoke Agamemnon, and all Achaeans cheered.

End of Book III

## Book IV

The gods watched the city of Trojans from above,  
seated by Zeus Father in assembly on the golden floor  
of Olympus. Among them went sweet Hebe  
with a wreath of platinum leaves as crown,  
o goddess of youth!—Hebe poured out  
the liquid nectar as they wished. The Immortals  
lifted their gold cups to themselves and their work,  
with Troy beneath; and Zeus straightaway challenged  
wife Hera before all present, queen of all heights,  
to respond to his teasing words in kind :

“Menelaus has two goddesses for helpers,  
Hera of Argos and Alacomenean Athena!  
How much pleasure they take in sitting here  
watching—while smiling Aphrodite  
ever moves with him, keeping him from death.  
For just now, I think, he was about to experience it.

Surely we all agree Menelaus wins the victory?  
So now we must think on this, and how things shall be.  
Would you continue the clamour of evil war  
through your own instigation? Or shall we  
provoke friendship between all these people?

If pleasant friendship is acceptable to you,  
and that King Priam’s city may stay standing high,  
then allow Helen and Menelaus to return together  
home to Argos.”

So Queen Hera and Athena heard Zeus.

Then, sat side by side, they murmured among themselves,  
contriving to bring nasty tribulation to the Trojans.

But who cared to reply to Zeus' teasing words?

Athena withheld answer, but fury inside her  
surfaced on her face, a ferocious glower  
focused on her father. Queen Hera, meanwhile,  
incapable of restraint, let her anger fly, and spoke :

"God of Time, what a speech!

You treat lightly what you see, these armies  
mingled on the Scamander plain? You would tease me  
for *that*? And all the sweat that covered me in my efforts  
(let alone how weary my horses were) to assemble  
that tremendous army and punish small Priam and his sons!  
Do what you will; but not all gods here are overwhelmed  
with your teasing. Or your decision."

Hera excited a fury in cloud-gathering Zeus :

"Wondrous queen! What evils have Priam and his sons ever worked  
on you, that you so eagerly struggle to obliterate  
the well-built city and the good Trojan people?  
Entering his walls, and his gates, and devouring Priam  
raw, and the sons of Priam, too, and all the Trojans that live,  
is the only remedy for your upset? Do what you will;  
I would rather this not cause conflict between us.

But hear me now, and remember these words :  
in future, when I obliterate a city

where much-loved friends of yours live, don't fritter away  
 your breath and anger me; but let it be;  
 as I'm giving in to you here against my better judgment.

Under sparkling heaven and the sun there are many cities  
 with many peoples spread over the earth, but I respected  
 holy Ilium above all others, King Priam and all  
 his people expert with the ashen spear.

They never failed to lay gifts on my altar,  
 nor failed to pour, but ever sent up the savour  
 of the sacrifice, our gift of honour, our right."

And bright-eyed Hera answered him :

"The cities I love best are Argos and Sparta  
 and Mycenae of the graceful ceramics.  
 Now you know. Obliterate them if they pique you,  
 or even for your amusement—I'm not bothered.  
 Nor will I be. We both know my displeasure  
 counts for nothing. You destroy whatever you like  
 and no one can stop you. But my labour should count  
 for something, and not be idle effort. I, too, am a god,  
 and my family, you'll remember, is your own;  
 the tricky-minded Cronos is my father, too.  
 But do you honour me as family? Or wife?  
 No. The glorious king of the Immortals chooses to tease!

You and I must come some distance closer  
 to each other. We must work together,  
 you with me, and I with you; and all the other



Immortals will stand with us. Then we'll be stronger,  
if it's possible. So please command Athena  
to join the battle of Trojans and Achaeans.  
She will motivate Troy to break their oaths,  
and bring the Achaeans much hurt."

All that Hera said. And Zeus Orderer obeyed,  
if only to improve the peace of Olympus,  
and promptly spoke to Athena :

"Go then to the matched armies of the Trojans and Achaeans.  
Employ all the mind you have to find a way for Troy to break  
its oaths and bring the Achaeans much hurt."

So he spoke, and Athena, already eager,  
went hotly down from the peaks of Olympus.  
And sailors on the sea, and peoples all over,  
and both warrior armies saw a brilliant fire  
streak across the sky, the descent of Athena  
down into the crowd on the Trojan plain;  
and astonishment arose from the earth.  
The horse-taming Trojans and bronze-armoured Achaeans  
looked on with awe; and one turned to the next to say :

"Zeus has decided! He-who-orders-war-and-peace!  
Must we fight on? or is our friendship sealed?"

This the soldiers of both armies wondered.

Now many a Trojan warrior saw brave spearman  
Laodocus, son of Antenor, racing through

their disciplined lines, looking lively everywhere,  
 eager to find someone. But how to find one man  
 in a crowd of over one hundred thousand strong?  
 Yet he found mighty Pandaros, son of Lycaon,  
 easily. This excellent warrior stood with the men  
 he'd brought from the river Aesepus by Ida,  
 mountain sacred to Rhea, mother of all gods.  
 Laodocus came close, and spoke with winged words :

"Please, hear me now, battle-wise son of Lycaon,"  
 said goddess Athena, warlike maiden, in voice  
 and shape of the other, "do you dare to let fly  
 a death-bringing arrow into Menelaus?  
 What a celebration of blessing you would win!  
 All of the Trojans will lift you up in glory!  
 Royal Alexandros will be especially pleased;  
 he'll be the very first to honour you with gifts,  
 once he sees the warlike Menelaus run through  
 with your arrow, and tossed onto the flaming pyre.

So come now. Take aim at glorious Menelaus.  
 And pray to Apollo of-the-wolf, who lets fly  
 and hits his mark always, that you will sacrifice  
 in his honour a hecatomb of newborn lambs,  
 when you return home to your holy city of Zeleia."

So whispered the goddess in the ear of the man,  
 who obeyed senselessly. First, he stripped off  
 the covering from his shining bow, made of horn  
 from a wild ibex, which he himself had taken,  
 lying in wait for it; as it sprung off a rock

he let fly and hit it through to the heart;  
and it fell backwards into a crack in the rock.

The horns on its head had grown sixteen rings long.  
These a workman had remodelled into a bow :  
assembling it, and smoothing it carefully,  
and polishing it well; then fitted tips of gold.

Now mighty Pandaros lowered to a crouch,  
unseen midst his warriors and their shields;  
and he set his bow down carefully on the ground,  
and prepared it. Then, he opened the lid  
of his quiver, and drew out a feathered arrow,  
fresh-made, never yet shot : a bringer of black pains.  
And as he strung the sharp-tipped arrow he promised  
Apollo of-the-wolf a sacrifice  
in his honour of a hecatomb of newborn lambs,  
when he returns home to his holy city of Zeleia.  
Then with the notched arrow tight between his fingers  
he drew back the bowstring, a rawhide sinew, to his chest,  
and the tip of the arrow had come to the bow,  
and at full stretch, he let fly. The bowstring sang  
as the arrow leapt gladly out into the legion of men.

O Menelaus! Blest were the gods who watched you  
from above! So Athena of-the-winds swooped in  
before him, and knocked the arrow off its deadly way,  
just as a mother waves aside a whirling fly  
off her sleeping child. Athena Goddess sent it  
into a double-layered piece of his body  
armour, where breast-plate joined belt with a clasp.

The arrow tore through the leather overlap  
and forced its hateful way through to the belt  
that he wore as best defence against piercings;  
but the arrow ripped through the belt and sliced open  
the skin of the warrior, and stuck there inside  
him; and dark blood gushed from the wound.

As when a woman dyes ivory with a touch  
of scarlet, a lady of Maeonia or Caria,  
when she hand-works a cheekpiece for horses :  
and it lies in a store-room of treasures,  
though many a charioteer prays to wear it :  
but it lay there as a king's delight, to ornament  
his own horse, and grace his charioteer :  
even so were the thighs of Menelaus dyed  
with blood, which ran down his powerful legs  
and stained his ankles beneath him.

Agamemnon king of men shivered in terror  
to see dark blood gushing from Menelaus' wound.

And Menelaus was himself concerned, till he saw  
the barbs of the arrowhead—only the sharp tip  
had stuck him; his belt caught the rest of the arrow.  
So his warlike spirit renewed itself twofold,  
and he let out a heavy sigh of relief.

But Agamemnon, hearing the sigh as a death-moan,  
let out his own heavy sigh, and all the men sighed  
with him. He took his brother's hand and spoke :

“Dear Menelaus! I have killed you with these oaths  
and sacrifice! We have been betrayed!

Ah, something

will come of these oaths, the blood of the lambs,  
the pouring of the pure wine, our welcome right hands—  
everything we put our trust in! If Olympus  
this very moment does not make them pay, then we will!  
It doesn’t matter how long it takes—we will have  
all their heads, and their wives, and their children.  
Zeus allows things to be as they are, until he  
ends them. I give you my solemn promise the day  
will come when holy Troy is obliterated  
to the last particle, with Priam, and Priam’s  
people, regardless of their ashen spears.  
Zeus high in heaven will answer their treachery  
with black anger : and this is how it will be.

But, you, dear Menelaus, you cannot die!  
What a terrible misery it would be,  
if you completed your life and crossed over  
to Hades. All the other Achaeans will go  
straight home, and leave Argive Helen for Paris;  
and when I get back to Argos I will be scorned!  
Because your bones will rot the soil of Troy  
with our work unfinished; and those miserable  
Trojans will laugh and step all over your tomb  
and say : ‘If this is how Agamemnon settles  
his troubles then we’ll never have any worries!  
He led his army pointlessly, and now leaves  
with empty ships, and Menelaus dead!’

This they will say.—Rather let the earth swallow me up!”

And Menelaus answered him :

“All is well,” he said, “and do not alarm the men.

The shot went awry. It’s no fatal wound.

Most of it is sticking in my armour.”

And Agamemnon replied :

“I hope so, dear brother! Have a surgeon look at it, and give you some herbs for the pain.”

Then he turned to his trusted minister

Talthybius, and said :

“Sir, summon our best surgeon here quick as you can—

Machaon, son of the peerless Asclepius.

Tell him mighty Menelaus has an arrow in him (which some bastard Trojan or Lycian sent, hoping to wound us for his own glory).”

So he spoke, and his minister heard and obeyed.

He rushed through the glimmering Achaean army until he came to the warriors from Tricca.

There he found the noble Machaon, and he said to him :

“Come now! son of Asclepius, King Agamemnon summons you! Mighty Menelaus has an arrow in him, which some bastard Trojan or Lycian sent, hoping to wound us for his own glory.”

This he said. So the physician gathered his things,  
then they hurried back through the myriad lines  
of their forces.

They arrived at a gathering of commanders  
standing in a circle, and Machaon went inside,  
and came to the wounded Menelaus. At once  
he drew the arrow from the belt with such force  
that the barbs bent backward. Then he removed  
the layers of body armour (which a metalworker  
had fashioned to Menelaus' measurements),  
and saw the wound where the hateful arrow had hit.  
He washed away the blood, then applied some mellow  
herbs given to his father many years ago  
by the legendary Cheiron, teacher of men.

While the Achaean leaders were busy round Menelaus,  
the Trojan leaders began preparing for battle.  
So the Achaeans saw them getting into position,  
and putting on their armour, and buckling up  
their shields. And both armies knew that war was coming.

Then you would not have seen δῖος Agamemnon napping,  
nor cowering from fear, with no heart in the fight;  
but eager for combat, where men reveal themselves  
as they are, and win.

His snorting horses, yoked to his chariot, were led  
by his assistant Eurymedon, son of Ptolemaeus,  
son of Peirareus, behind King Agamemnon,

as he went forth on foot to inspect the ranks  
 of his soldiers. He had requested of his man  
 to lead his massive chariot, glittering with bronze,  
 should weariness weaken his legs along the way,  
 as he gave orders to the various leaders  
 of the massed Achaean forces. As it was,  
 this day, King Agamemnon never did step up  
 into his chariot, when he went through his men.

And whenever he saw contingents of Danaans  
 hurrying with swift horses forward to the front  
 of the lines, he smiled, and stood by, and shouted  
 them godly encouragement :

“You Argives! Set upon every detail well!  
 No easing of bravery even for an instant!  
 For Zeus Father scorns treachery, and won’t help them!  
 They were the first to spoil us, to transgress our oaths,  
 so now their soft flesh will be left for vultures!  
 We’ll carry away their wives, and their dear little children,  
 once we’ve obliterated the city!”

And whenever he saw contingents of Danaans  
 dawdling, not preparing for slaughterous war,  
 he upbraided them with fearsome words :

“Are you Argives, or shameful things? Why these  
 frightened faces? Prepare for battle! You cowards  
 look like fawns shivering at the sight of a plain!  
 Have your hearts no bravery? You stand there  
 like a sorry herd of deer! Ready yourselves to fight!



Are you waiting for the Trojans to march over  
 you and get to our priceless ships put up to shore?  
 Are you waiting to see if Zeus will protect you?"

So he continued along the lines of warriors,  
 dispensing his orders, and inspecting morale;  
 and as he moved among the vastitude of men  
 he came to the warriors from Crete, superior  
 in combat. Just now they were arming themselves  
 around their war-wise leader Idomeneus,  
 who stood seething like a wild boar ready to strike.  
 Meriones, meanwhile, was encouraging  
 the warriors in the rear of their battle-lines.  
 Seeing this, commander Agamemnon smiled,  
 and addressed Idomeneus with gracious words :

"Idomeneus! You know well I honour you  
 above all the Danaans that live, both in war,  
 and in works of all kinds; and at the feasts,  
 when the counsellors of the Achaeans  
 mix the best of our sparkling wines, each drinks  
 their portion, but your cup I always keep full,  
 like my own, for you to drink whenever your heart  
 wills it. Come now! and into battle! Show yourself  
 to be what you've always been : a great warrior."

And Idomeneus, leader of the Cretans, answered him :

"Son of Atreus, therefore I shall stay as you say!  
 And will keep the promise I gave you from the first.  
 But some of the Achaeans around us need to get

ready for battle. Senselessly the Trojans spoiled  
our oath of friendship, so now we shall bring them  
pain and death.”

So he spoke, and the commander of the army  
moved on, exulting at heart, through the multitude  
of warriors, and came to the Aiantes—the two  
Ajaxes, who will prefer to fight side by side.  
Beside them marched their foot-forces, raising a dust  
cloud all round. As from a place of look-out  
a shepherd sees a cloud—yet far-off, but driven  
by a screaming West Wind in his direction;  
and sees it moving, pitch-black, over the waves  
of the deep, the shadow of a terrible storm,  
and he trembles to see it, and hastens his flock  
into a cave : even so did the youths beside  
the Aiantes move over the plain in dense, dark  
battle-lines, warriors beloved of Zeus :  
they marched darkly with bristling spears and shields.  
And the commander of the army exulted  
at heart to see this, and gave them respectful word :

“You Aiantes! Great leaders of the armoured  
Argives! No need to give you any word of command!  
You’ve put your men in fighting spirit! Ah, by Zeus!  
and Athena! and Apollo! If only your  
fire burned in the hearts of all the warriors  
here! Quickly then would Priam’s lofty city  
fall to dust at our hands, and be plundered!”

So spoke Agamemnon, who left them as they were

and went on to others. He found Nestor, the well-voiced speaker of the Pylians, arranging his men and rousing them with stirring words to fight. There, too, were Pelagon and Alastor and Chromius, and Haemon and mighty Bias, shepherd of men. They had put their chariots in front and the foot-soldiers behind, and Nestor was telling them all :

“In the old days, men, when we faced the enemy we threw our spears from the racing chariot. That way was thought to be the best. And men long ago took cities and walled citadels that way. But now you dismount first, then fight. If you’re brave, and trust your horsemanship, keep in mind how your mighty ancestors were minded. And be sure to keep your horses true, so you don’t trample your own soldiers.”

So spoke Nestor. As for the foot-soldiers, he put the weaker men in the centre of them : like it or not, all cowards would enter into combat.

So in this way Nestor arranged his warriors, using knowledge from battles of long ago.

Seeing this, Agamemnon smiled; and he went to Nestor, and said :

“Ah, old sir,  
if only your experience were matched by youth,  
your strength today would be invincible! May it be  
that your great heart lifts these limbs of yours to strike

down many a Trojan! That would be best, to see  
you master old age itself and look young again.”

And Nestor answered him :

“Son of Atreus, I would gladly go back to the day  
I cut Ereuthalion down. As it is, I’ll go along  
with the charioteers, to counsel and encourage.  
Today I’ll let the young ones play the warrior.”

So he spoke, and the commander of the army  
moved on, exulting at heart. He found Peteos’  
son Menestheus standing in place, and standing  
round him were the Athenians, masters of war.

Odysseus was standing near, by the straight lines  
of the Cephallenians, a warlike people, yet  
just now standing still, in silence, as if they had  
yet to hear the war-cry, though many lines of warriors  
were now moving forward towards battle. Yet these men  
stood in place, waiting in ordered silence.

Seeing this, King Agamemnon upbraided them,  
and spoke with winged words :

“Ah, son of Peteos, king beloved of Zeus!  
And you, expert in clever trickery, crafty-  
minded Odysseus! Will you please tell me why  
you’re cowering here, standing in place? What is it  
you’re waiting for? Knowing you as I do, you two  
should be up in the front, leading the way into

battle. For whenever we summon for the feast,  
 you two aren't seen standing around, but rushing to  
 eat the roast meats, and drink the honey-sweet wine  
 to your heart's content. But now you're happy to stand,  
 even if you saw ten rows of Achaeans fighting in front,  
 facing the cruel bronze."

Scowling, Odysseus πολύμητις answered him :

"Son of Atreus, I have no idea what you're talking about.  
 You call us 'cowering'? If you care to see slaughterous war,  
 watch every battle we fight. When the Achaeans  
 and Trojans meet, the father of Telemachus  
 will be fighting in front, facing the foremost Trojans.  
 What you say now is as the wind : empty."

King Agamemnon smiled and gladly took back  
 his words :

"Zeus-born son of Laertes, subtle-minded Odysseus!  
 I shall tease you no further; and give you no orders.  
 Your heart thinks well of us. And just now, you and I  
 share the same mind. So enough! I will atone  
 later for anything disagreeable said now;  
 but may the gods take it all away with the winds."

So he spoke, and the commander of the army  
 moved on, and went to others. He found Tydeus'  
 son, the high-spirited Diomedes, standing  
 in his sleek chariot, reining his eager horses;  
 and Capaneus' son Sthenelus stood beside

him. When Agamemnon saw this he spoke,  
upbraiding them with fearsome words :

“Ah, son of Tydeus the war-wise! Why cower  
like this, staring from afar into the path to war?  
Go! Tydeus surely never cowered like this,  
but was ever in front of his friends, destroying  
the enemy! I never met him or saw him,  
but men say he was beyond all men! Who doesn’t  
know the tale of Tydeus and the Cadmeians?  
He was a stranger in Mycenae, all alone,  
yet challenged every last man there to wrestle,  
and beat them all easily. (They say Athena  
helped him.) So on his way out of town, fifty youths  
(the Cadmeians) lay in wait for him in the reeds  
by an overgrown river. And Tydeus killed  
them all. One man only he let live, following  
signs and omens in the air from the gods.  
This was your father, Tydeus of Aetolia.  
But we hear what people say. ‘His son’s a lesser  
warrior, though he speaks well in assembly.’”

So he spoke, and mighty Diomedes grimaced  
with uneasy outrage, and answered not a word.  
So Capaneus’ son, noble Sthenelus,  
answered him, and said :

“Son of Atreus, why lie when truth comes easier  
to you? We say solemnly that we are better  
than our fathers. *We* took seven-gated Thebe  
(and we *did* take it) with fewer warriors, and

against its mighty wall. We brought to those sinners  
destruction. So don't hold us next to our fathers."

Scowling, mighty Diomedes answered him :

"Friend, keep out of it, and hear me : Agamemnon,  
our commander, wants to win, and that's the point  
and be-all of all of it. If we fail to take Troy,  
he will face great grief—and you and I will be dead."

So come then! let us think of battle and obliteration."

So spoke Diomedes. Then, from his chariot,  
in full armour, he sprang to the ground; and fearful  
was the rattle of the bronze upon his body  
as he moved. Even the most defiant of men  
well might have quailed at the sound of it.

As when the ever-rushing wave of the sea smashes against  
shore in a polychromatic blast, driven by the West Wind :  
out in the deep it increases to a crest, then shatters on  
land with splashy roar : and all along the land's-edge the water  
swells, and butts its head, and spits forth its foamy froth all over  
the headlands, dousing the rocks with salt spray : just in this way, one  
after another, the Danaans marched in lines of battle  
unceasingly over the plain, towards Ilium and its men.  
Except for now and then a command shouted by a leader  
to his warriors, the entire Achaean army marched  
in silence : though one might not believe this of so vast an army :  
they were silent, as if without voice, obeying the command  
of their leaders : and their shining armour glimmered as they marched

in rows. The Trojans, however—like a multitude of ewes,  
 agglomerated and bleating in the yard of a man of wealth,  
 incessantly bleating to be milked of their milk, when they hear  
 the bleats of their lambs : just so were the polyglot battle-cries  
 resounding up and down the broad lines of the Trojan army.  
 Their warriors spoke a blended glossolalia of tongues,  
 for the Trojan forces consisted of men of different lands.  
 These men were motivated by Ἄρης ; and the Achaeans  
 by Athena Shining-Eyes : and all warriors together  
 by ( Δεῖμος ) Terror and ( φόβος ) Panic, and ( Ἔρις ) Frenzy  
 that rages insatiably, a sister and friend of Ἄρης  
 man-killer. Revealing her crest only a little at first, she  
 rears up her head into the clouds while her feet tread the earth.  
 She it was, Ἔρις , goddess of chaos, who now threw awful discord  
 into the crush of battle, as she came down into the crowd,  
 increasing the groans of men.

At once the two rushing armies

met in a crashing of iron and bronze, their shields  
 clashing together with the fury of armoured  
 warriors charging far and wide across the plain,  
 with long spears raised and bristling one with another,  
 with front-lines surging ahead of the dense middle,  
 and intermixing; and tumultuous clamour  
 filled the air entire. Soon to come were death-groans  
 and victory-shouts of the killers and the killed,  
 and the earth become red with blood. As when winter-  
 swelled rivers, flooded and gushing down mountainsides  
 from their rushing springs to a spot where two valleys  
 meet, and join their raging floods in the deep ravine,  
 and the herdsman on the hillside hears the thunder



of it from far off : even so was the mingled  
clamour of shouting and struggle.

First, Antilochus, son of Nestor, struck down to  
Hades, with a blow, a Trojan in bronze armour,  
an honourable soldier who had charged up to  
the front to fight, Echepolus, Thalysius' son.  
Antilochus plunged his spear through his bushy-plumed  
helmet and on through his forehead, and the spear-point  
passed into his brain; and his eyes went blank, and he  
collapsed straight down like a shattered tower, amid  
surging combat. When he fell, the high-spirited king  
Elephenor, leading the Abantes, seized hold  
of his feet, he the son of Chalcodon, and sought  
to drag him away from under the darkening spray  
of spears and stones and arrows flying overhead,  
eager to quickly strip off the armour of the dead,  
as a trophy to carry away : but his purpose  
occupied only little time, as death-dealing  
Agenor saw him dragging the corpse, and also  
saw how Elephenor had let his shield uncover  
his side, as he bent to the body, so he stuck  
his spear in between his ribs, loosening his limbs.  
So he lost his breath forever, and the surging  
armies trampled him into the dirt as Trojans  
and Achaeans fought ragefully, springing like wolves  
one upon another, man against man.

Then Telamonian Ajax, the tremendous  
Ajax, struck down vigorous Simoeisius,  
an unmarried youth, Anthemion's son.

Beside the green banks of the river Simois  
 his mother had birthed him, as she came down  
 from Ida, where she had travelled with her parents  
 to see their flocks. For this reason the baby was named  
 Simoeisius. He hadn't yet chanced to repay  
 the debt of his parents' tender care, and his life  
 lasted but a brief moment, for he was conquered  
 by the hand of great-hearted Ajax. In the front  
 of the battle he was struck through the chest  
 by the right nipple; and the death-bringing spear went  
 straight through his shoulder and out through his back,  
 and his feet gave way, and down he fell to the dust.

Just as a poplar tree, even and tall, but shorn  
 of its branches, for the craftsman to bend them  
 into wheel-rims for the beautiful chariots,  
 lies drying on its side by the river.

Just so did Zeus-born Ajax rob Simoeisius  
 of life. And quick-moving Antiphus, Priam's son,  
 saw through the crowd, and hurled his sharp spear at Ajax.  
 He missed him, but struck Leucus in the groin, a good  
 soldier of Odysseus', as he dragged the corpse  
 off to his side, away from due burial rites;  
 so the dead body fell from his hands, and his own  
 corpse fell onto it. Seeing this, Odysseus  
 got enraged, and stalked among the turbulent front  
 lines of battle, his body sheathed in flashing bronze,  
 till he came exceedingly close to the enemy;  
 then, glancing all round, his eyes flashing fire,  
 he let his shining spear fly : and the Trojan

warriors fell back from his throw : but it was no  
 vain effort : he struck Priam's son Democoön,  
 who'd come from his father's horse farm at Abydos  
 to fight, an ill decision, for Odysseus'  
 spear-point of bronze, thrown in anger for the fallen,  
 struck him in the side of the head and drove clean through :  
 and his eyes went blank, and he dropped to the earth,  
 and his armour clattered around him. Meanwhile,  
 Hector and the other foremost Trojans fighting  
 in front were being beaten back, and the Argives  
 shrieked, a terrible sound, and charged onwards,  
 pushing the dead aside and advancing on the enemy.

And Apollo of-the-wolves, watching from afar,  
 shouted in anger to the Trojan warriors :

"Rouse yourselves, Trojans! Tamers of wild horses!  
 Stop this retreat from the fight with the Argives!  
 They're not stone and iron but skin and bone like you!  
 Their bodies will not resist the sharp-cutting bronze  
 when they are struck! And Achilles is not in the fight!  
 The son of Thetis wavy-haired sits by his ships,  
 brooding over a rage going round in his head!  
 Trojans! Forward!"

Thus spoke the fearsome god from the direction of the city.

But the Achaeans had Athena omni-μητις , goddess  
 most glorious, motivating them, whenever she saw them  
 giving way.

Then Diores, son of Amarynceus, met  
 his fate. A jagged stone hit him at the ankle,  
 thrown by Peiros, Imbrasmus' son, leader  
 of the Thracian warriors, come from Ainos.  
 The tendons were torn by the pitiless rock,  
 and the bones shattered, and backwards he fell  
 in the dust. He raised up his hands to his friends,  
 but Peiros ran over and sliced his belly  
 open, and his bowels spilled out onto the earth,  
 and he lost his breath forever.

As Peiros made to spring back to his lines, Thoas  
 of Aetolia impaled him with his spear,  
 and the bronze-tip was stuck in his lung : then Thoas  
 came close, and yanked the fatal spear out of his chest;  
 then drew his sword, and sank its sharp point deep  
 in his belly, and robbed him of his life.

Then his Thracian friends, who bound their hair in top-  
 knots, leaped in round the body, their deadly spear-points  
 reaching far out, and Peiros, who once was mighty  
 and brave, now obliged others to drive back Thoas,  
 who, surprised, lost his chance of stripping the armour,  
 and fell backwards into his lines.

So they lay in the dust one by another :  
 there, for the Trojans, Peiros, a leader of the Thracians;  
 here, an Achaean, Diores, leader of the Epeians.

And around them dead men were spread all over the plain.  
 No longer could one army make light of the other :

not with so many warriors lying face-down in the dust.

End of Book IV

## Book V

Athena Contriver endowed Diomedes  
with power and courage; so that, possessed with these,  
he should move conspicuous among the Argives,  
and excite marvellous awe in all who saw him,  
and win glory. She worked inside him and blazed out  
an inexhaustible fire from his helmet and shield;  
as a star coming at harvest, shining brighter  
than the rest, rises from Oceanus' waves :  
such blazing power he possessed from head to foot;  
thus, motivated by Athena war-minded,  
he charged into the deepest of the fray.

And appearing ahead of him in the gory  
turbulence was a wealthy Trojan called Dares,  
an excellent man and priest of Hephaestus;  
and his two sons well-knew many fighting methods.  
These two separated, then charged divergent at  
Diomedes, they in their chariot, and he  
rushing on furiously on foot. As they closed  
in on him, the younger brother, Phlegaeus,  
first let fly his death-bringing spear, but it flew past  
the left shoulder of Tydeus' son Diomedes,  
and he escaped without a scratch. Then Diomedes  
threw, and his hand was sure, and the spear struck the chest  
of Phlegaeus between the nipples, and pushed him  
backwards off his racing chariot. Then the older brother  
leapt off his own very beautiful chariot,  
which headed on to Diomedes. This son of Dares  
dare not lie fallen beside his brother, knowing

his holy father would be wholly undone by grief.  
 But he would not yet escape from Diomedes,  
 or the coming of black fate, had not inventive  
 god Hephaestus, respecting his patron,  
 the priest Dares, obscured his son in the moving  
 darkness of the battle riot, and saved his life.

So the high-spirited son of Tydeus, mighty  
 Diomedes, took all their horses, and ordered  
 his men to lead them back to the fixed ships.

And when the Trojans saw the two sons of Dares,  
 one fleeing, the other dead by his chariot,  
 all their hearts became crazed with panic.

At that unseemly sight—cowardice—Athena  
 Shining-Eyes took the hot hand of irate Ἴφης  
 and said to him :

“Ἴφης , Ἴφης , world-destroying Ἴφης !  
 Look at you, your garments filthy with blood!  
 Come away from Trojan and Achaeon. Let’s rest.  
 Shall we let them be for now, to fight it out  
 on their own? We shall see which army Zeus Father  
 hands victory. So you and I slip away  
 for now, and stay out of the way of his rage.”

Thus spoke Athena, and led Ἴφης away  
 from the fight. They sat down by the flowery banks  
 of the river Scamander. There, in comfort,  
 they watched the Danaans lean their heavy weight

against the Trojans, and drive them back. Each man cut  
 down a leader : first, Agamemnon flung from  
 his chariot at the not-so-invincible  
 Odus, leader of the Halizones;  
 and as he turned to flee, the spear impaled  
 itself between his shoulder blades, and its gory  
 spear-tip burst out through his chest. And he fell to earth,  
 and his armour clattered around him.

And Idomeneus, flashing there, now here, like  
 a nightmare reared on Phaestus and cut him down,  
 the son of Borus the Maeonian. He'd come  
 from the fertile fields of Tarne, a quiet Lydian town.  
 Hoping to flee, Phaestus had one foot in his chariot  
 when the long night-bringing spear in Idomeneus' grip  
 pierced through his right shoulder : so he tumbled off  
 his chariot into depthless death.

Idomeneus' personal attendants  
 then stole away his armour.

Now, Strophius' son Scamandrius, well-skilled  
 in the hunt, for forest-goddess Artemis  
 herself had taught him the arts of killing  
 all things raised in wild mountain forests,  
 of how to pursue his prey, and subdue it,  
 whatever its size : now, arrow-showering  
 Artemis ignored him, and no aid at all was  
 his long-experienced excellence in archery :  
 for the death-bringing spear in the hands of the son  
 of Atreus, Menelaus, struck him in the back



as he ran for his life, and the bloody bronze burst  
through his chest. He coughed out blood as he fell  
face-down, and his armour clattered around him.

Meriones killed Phereclus, son of Tecton,  
Harmon's son. When he died, three generations  
of mastery in art died with him. His hands once  
knew all manner of intricate craftsmanship, for  
Athena Seer had loved him very much. He  
it was who had built for Alexandros the well-  
balanced sea-ships that began all the trouble  
for the Trojans, and for himself, all because  
he had no knowledge of the signs of the gods.  
Meriones chased him down and stuck his spear-point  
up through his ass and clean into his bladder  
through bone : so he dropped to his knees with rageful cry,  
and death took him away.

And Pedaeus, Antenor's son, fell before Meges.  
Though born illegitimate, he was raised by δῖος  
Theano lovingly, and equally with her  
own children, to make her husband happy.  
But Phyleus' son Meges brought his spear  
like a rush of fire sharply into the bone  
at the nape of his neck; and pushed through his mouth,  
ripping his tongue away : so with the cold bronze stuck  
in his teeth he dropped to the dust.

And Euaemon's son Eurypylus killed δῖος  
Hypsenor, son of kind-spirited Dolophin,  
whom the people had ordained as priest of river-

god Scamander, and was honoured by all as a  
god. But Eurypylus caught up with Hypsenor,  
and sliced his muscular arm off at the shoulder;  
and it dropped bloody at his feet; and death took him  
forever.

So the two mighty armies struggled in combat :  
a confused havoc in dust : and the earth trembled  
under their feet, rattling the armour of the freshly dead.  
And Diomedes couldn't have said which of the two  
he moved among, so interwoven were the lines  
of Trojan and Achaean, as he charged like a  
raging winter river overswelling with storm-rain  
and spilling over its banks, no longer confined  
as it rushes unrestrained over cultivated  
field and vineyard and threshing floor,  
Zeus' heavy rain bringing to ruin  
many sophisticated works of man :  
even so was the thick confusion of Trojan  
battle-lines collapsing in wild retreat :  
and though they were many, no one dared face him head-on.

But from afar, Trojan Pandaros observed him  
darting across the plain like a shooting star, driving  
his enemy back into confusion and rout.  
Pandaros drew his bow to full stretch and let fly,  
and hit his mark, somewhat : Diomedes was struck  
on the right shoulder, and the arrow tore through  
his breast-plate and kept going : and Diomedes  
looked down to see blood spoiling his armour.

And illustrious Pandaros, son of Lycaon,  
seeing the result, shouted aloud :

“Forward, Trojans! You breakers of horses! The best  
of the Achaeans is hit! Surely he’s breathing his last!  
—If truly Apollo led me here when I left Lykia!”

This he boasted loudly : but his arrow did not  
subdue Diomedes, who fell back to his horses  
and chariot. There, he spoke to good Sthenelus :

“Hey, friend, come down here and pull this goddamn arrow out of me.”

So he spoke. Sthenelus jumped down from the chariot,  
came up behind Diomedes and saw the arrow  
sticking out his shoulder, with its bloody barbed point.  
With one quick tug he yanked the arrow out, then came  
around to face Diomedes, who tore off his  
breast-plate to see his blood leaking down his tunic.

And Diomedes prayed in a whisper :

*“Hear me, Zeus Daughter—Unwearied—Invincible!  
If ever you stood kindly by my father in hateful battle  
stand now by me! Athena! Allow me to kill  
that man. Let him feel the force of my spear-point,  
he who struck from afar and boasted over me,  
and thought I was done with the bright light of the sun.”*

So he prayed, and Athena goddess heard, and rose  
from the river. She came near to him, and relaxed

his limbs, and removed all thought of pain from his mind;  
and in his ear she whispered :

“Forward, Diomedes!” she said. “The Trojans await your hand,  
and the sword in it. And in your heart the spirit  
of your father Tydeus, strong shield-bearing charioteer,  
grows ever stronger, for I am with you, and will never leave.

I have lifted the mist from your eyes, Diomedes, so now,  
for the first time, you may perceive both man *and* god.

So, if a god comes here to test you, do not fight face to face  
with any Immortal—except Aphrodite. If *she* comes  
into the fight, cut her with your sharp sword.”

So spoke Athena Shining-Eyes, and backed away.

And Diomedes son of Tydeus once more  
immersed himself in battle, eager as before,  
and moved on under the susperation of spears  
to the foremost fighters at the front-lines. His heart  
was already in the fight, but now three times more  
eager to face Trojans : Death gave Diomedes  
a reason to live.

Just as a lion a shepherd  
has wounded to protect his woolly sheep  
as it sprang over a fence into the pasture,  
stands bloody, but alive : his anger roused,  
the lion stalks the earth, and savages the panicked  
sheep that see no escape : then, leaving them lying

dead, the lion of fury leaps over the fence  
and away : just so did furious Diomedes  
heap up Trojan dead.

He killed Astynous, and Hypeiron, leader  
of men; the one with a spear-point stuck in his throat,  
and for the other he drew his sword and shaved off  
his shoulder, straight through the clavicle, and it slid  
away from his neck and back and dropped to his feet.

He left them as they were and went after Abas  
and Polyidus, sons of ancient Eurydamas,  
seer and reader of dreams. The old man, however,  
had not seen Diomedes coming : and their lives  
were taken away. Then he went after Xanthus  
and Thoön, the two cherished sons of Phaenops,  
for the man was worn down with age, and they alone  
were left to inherit his life's wealth. But Diomedes  
killed them, and left for the father a bitter sorrow,  
for his sons never came back from war to receive  
his embrace : and when he died, the people  
divided up his wealth among themselves.

Diomedes then saw two of King Priam's sons  
rolling along in one chariot, Echemmon  
and Chromius. He sprang on them, as a lion  
catches an ox by the neck when it feeds  
in a thicket, and the heavy ox, writhing  
in its jaws, breaks its own neck : just so, they  
struggled vainly with Tydeus' son,  
who tossed one then the other off the chariot.

Then he stripped off their armour, and gave the horses  
to his men, who drove them back to the ships.

Now when the leader of the Trojans, Aeneas,  
witnessed Diomedes' path of destruction  
through whole rows of warriors, he went through the havoc  
under the whistling rain of spears, in search of  
godly Pandaros, the Trojan army's finest sniper.  
When he found him, Aeneas went to Pandaros  
son of Lycaon, and spoke :

"Pandaros, why aren't you shooting your far-reaching  
arrows? Your famous bow is too heavy to lift?  
You're the best archer we have, and you've left behind  
no better in Lykia. So come! Raise your hands  
to heaven and send an arrow to that man there,  
whoever he is, who's moving like a madman!  
He's making much evil work of our warriors,  
killing them left and right—many fine warriors.  
Unless he's a god angry with us for whatever  
reason. What do you think?—improper sacrifices?  
Just how crushing can god's rage get?"

And Pandaros answered him :

"Aeneas, that son of a bitch is the son of Tydeus,  
Diomedes. I recognize him by his shield,  
and coloured helmet-hair, and by those tremendous  
horses of his. I can't say to a certainty  
that he's not a god, but if he's the simple man  
I say he is, the son of war-wise Tydeus,

he's not running riot without the assistance  
of some god at least. Some Immortal goes with him,  
but we men can't see. Just as my arrow hit him  
the god knocked it aside.

Yes, I let fly at him  
already, and I hit him through that glittery plate  
they wear. I thought I'd killed him, but my arrow  
only hit his right shoulder. I didn't kill him.  
Maybe god's raging at me for something.

And though you call me the best archer we have,  
I've yet to be given a chariot to use!  
When I left my father's halls we had eleven  
chariots, all first-rate, just sitting there under  
cover, each with its horse beside it, feeding on  
the barley and rye. Over and over again  
my father told me to take one of the well-built  
chariots with me, so I might rush into harsh  
combat like some wild thing—or even lead  
the Trojans into battle.

But I didn't listen.  
I said to myself, 'How will I find enough food  
for my horses amid the crowd of the army?'  
They've always been used to eating their fill, you see.

So I left them behind with my chariot—bad idea—  
and came on foot, trusting completely  
in my bow, which was destined to bring me no help.

Already I've hit two of their best leaders well  
 enough to draw blood, yet they're still walking around,  
 Menelaus and Diomedes, angrier at us now.

Why did I take this bastard bow from its peg,  
 the day I left for charming Ilium, to help  
 Hector!

If I get back home to my wife and house  
 (a palace, actually, a colossal high-roofed palace)—  
 when I see my homeland, some stranger man will  
 no doubt cut my head clean off when I step foot there—  
 that's how much luck this bow has given me!"

And Aeneas leader of the Trojans answered him :

"Tell me no more. Nothing will be otherwise  
 until we face this man Diomedes.  
 Come onto my chariot and see Troy's horses  
 run. Watch them flee before us over the plain.  
 If god grants victory to Diomedes,  
 the others will bring us back into the city.  
 Come on, take the whip and the reins, and I'll  
 step down, in order to fight. Or you stay here,  
 and I'll take care of the horses."

And the glorious son of Lycaon answered him :

"Aeneas, you hold the reins and drive the horses.  
 If we have to leave Tydeus' son in a hurry,  
 it's better if your horses hear their expected



driver's voice, and run, then hear mine, and stand there,  
 leaving us for Diomedes to cut us down,  
 and take the horses away. You drive the chariot,  
 and I'll await Diomedes with my spear-point."

Thus spoke sniper Pandaros. So the two of them  
 stepped up into the ornamented chariot  
 and roused the horses, in haste to find Diomedes.

So then the war-wise Sthenelus saw them coming,  
 and turned to Diomedes to say :

"Son of Tydeus, my good friend, there are two men  
 coming, and they look forceful about it. I know  
 them. They're no small warriors. I'd put their strength at—  
 immeasurable? It's the master archer Pandaros,  
 the one who says he's the son of Lycaon.  
 Next to him is Aeneas, son of royal Anchises.  
 It's said his mother is Aphrodite. Should we  
 harass a god's child, or get the hell out of here  
 for now—away from the front lines is all I mean,  
 until proper reinforcements? Have you not spilled  
 enough blood yet? We might get killed right around here."

Then through clenched teeth Diomedes spoke :

"Don't tell me that word 'retreat'. You will not persuade  
 me. It's not in me to slink away or cower :  
 my fury is unending. And I don't need a car  
 like theirs to meet them. I will face them as I am,  
 afraid of no man. This Athena has taught me.

Look at their horses : they won't be bringing two men  
back with them, I promise you that. Now listen to this  
and keep it in mind. If you wish to fight and ride,  
tie the reins tight to the rim-handle beforehand,  
but I'd rather you not. While I'm killing them both,  
you get those horses of theirs loose. Take them away  
from here and keep them safe. Those horses are as rare  
as Aeneas. Zeus gave them to Troy—something to do  
with Ganymede—and it's said these are the finest  
horses that ride in the Dawn and the Sun. Ancient  
king Laomedon handed them to Priam, but  
before that, sneaky Anchises got his own hand  
in there, put his own mares to them, and stole the blood-  
line. And Laomedon never heard a word of it  
when six foals were born at Anchises' palace.  
He kept four in his stables for himself, and gave  
the other two, which I think we're now seeing,  
to Aeneas, who presently raises the battle-cry.  
If we get those godly horses we'll win some fine praise."

Thus in this way they spoke to one another  
while the Trojans closed in on them through the rising  
dust, driving their magnificent horses.

And Pandaros was the first of all of them to speak, shouting :

"Strong-hearted battle-wise noble Diomedes!  
My sure arrow didn't kill you, my goddamn arrow!  
So now I shall hit the mark with my spear!"

As he spoke he raised his spear and let fly.  
 As the spear raced in, Diomedes raised his shield,  
 but the spear-point burst through, and the sharp tip touched his  
 belly : then stopped cold : his heavy shield had caught it.

And illustrious Pandaros, son of Lycaon,  
 seeing the result, shouted aloud :

“Right through the belly! You can’t stay on your feet now!  
 Thank you for the glory I shall surely receive!”

And Diomedes answered him coldly :

“You missed me,” he said. “Now I shall not stop until  
 one or another or both of you are dead.”

As he spoke, with Ἄρης and Athena watching,  
 Diomedes let fly : and his spear arced up in  
 to the sky, and as it fell Athena nudged it  
 straight, and it drove through his nose, tearing out his tongue  
 and shattering his white teeth as the stubborn spear-  
 point flew down and out through the bottom of his chin.  
 Backwards he fell off his speeding chariot, and  
 dropped, with a crash and a clatter, into the dust.  
 And the swift-footed thunderous horses shied from  
 Diomedes, and ran on and away : and there  
 Pandaros died.

And Aeneas jumped from the chariot with shield  
 and long spear, intent to guard the mutilated  
 corpse from being dragged away by the Achaeans.

He bestrode the body, standing there like a proud lion breathing fury, with his thick shield held up in front of him and his spear in his hand, eager to kill anybody coming close : and he let out a fearful cry. Diomedes, meanwhile, bent down, and with two hands lifted up a heavy stone, one too large for two men to bear upright for long, but which he lifted lightly from the earth. With this he crushed Aeneas' bones at the waist, where the hip-bone sockets the leg-bone, what people call 'the cup' : Diomedes destroyed all this; and the stone tore away sinew and skin. Then the Trojan hero dropped to his knees, gushing jets of blood, and came to lean upon the earth : and his eyes went blank.

Right there, king of men Aeneas would have died, but Aphrodite saw, his mother who lay with Anchises in the pasture-land. She spread out her arms and let her loose garment the colour of shining sunlight come down onto Aeneas, concealing him from spears and arrows and the Danaans with their horses.

Thus the goddess lifted her son up out of the fight.

Sthenelus, meanwhile, followed his orders, given him by Diomedes. His first task was to keep his own horses safe : so he steered his chariot away from battle, stepped down, and sent his horses racing back into the Achaean lines. Then he rushed at Aeneas' horses; up close they were unearthly beauties; and he drove the pair of them

into the glittering Achaean army and  
 handed them over to Deïpylus, the best  
 of all of his friends from youth, for they shared the same  
 outlook on things : and good Deïpylus took them  
 away to the ships.

Then Sthenelus jumped back up  
 into his chariot, took the reins, and drove his  
 horses headlong into the confused battle, in  
 search of Diomedes.

He, meanwhile, was after Cypris,  
 stalking the goddess with his sharp heartless bronze spear.  
 He knew she was weak, and not a god for the fight :  
 no Athena, no Enyo, destroyer of cities.

He pursued her through the swelling fight, flashing here,  
 now there, but he kept her in sight, and caught up to her,  
 and stabbed at her with his spear-point, slicing open  
 a wound along her wrist; and the parting in her  
 soft body let out an ambrosial gush : and she  
 cried out : and her son fell from her arms :

but Apollo was there to catch him, and remove  
 him from the spears and arrows and the Danaans with their horses.

And mighty Diomedes, seeing the result,  
 shouted loudly over her :

“Daughter of Zeus, keep out of war! It’s not enough  
 you fool weak women? If you come among us I

think you'll shudder even if you hear us from afar."

Thus spoke Diomedes. And Aphrodite, while  
he coldly watched her, slithered out from under him,  
dismayed and in pain, and went away unsteadily.

Iris Wind-Walker swooped in to lead Cypris away  
from the tumultuous battle; and saw the misery  
in her face, and the gushing damage to her body;  
and took her to Ἄρης at the flowery banks  
of the river Scamander. There, furious Ἄρης  
watched from the left end of the battle lines,  
and any man looking at him would have seen  
nothing more than a cloud : not him, nor his spear,  
nor his two powerful horses standing alert  
in harness and headdress of gold.

So Aphrodite dropped to her knees before  
man-slaughtering Ἄρης War God, and spoke :

"Dear brother, help me! Give me your horses  
so I can get home, back to Olympus.  
A man hurt me, a mortal man cut me open.  
He who would now fight Zeus Father himself!"

So she spoke. And Ἄρης nodded, and gave her  
his horses. So, the heart-sick Aphrodite stepped  
up into the chariot, and Iris came up  
beside her and took hold of the reins, then snapped  
the whip at the two horses, which eagerly flew  
forward. Straightaway they came to the space

of the gods, high Olympus. There, wind-swift Iris  
brought the chariot to a halt; then she unbound  
the horses and flung ambrosial food before them.

But δῖος Aphrodite sank to the knees of  
her mother Dione. Visionary priestess  
Dione, goddess older than Hera :  
she took her daughter in her arms, and caressed her,  
and called her by her name, and said :

“Which of the sky’s children has done this to you?  
Treated you so carelessly? As if you work evil  
in sight of all.”

And Aphrodite, she-of-the-many-smiles,  
answered her :

“Unbearable Diomedes, they call him Tydeus’ son,  
hit me, as I went to lift my dead son Aeneas away  
from battle, who was to me the best of all men.

That horrible war is more now than Trojan and Achaean!  
The Danaans are now fighting Immortals!”

δῖος goddess Dione answered her :

“Stay strong and stand tall, child, in face of all your cares.  
Many a time has earth brought sorrow to Olympus.  
Ἄρης , I remember, held out against two horrible things :  
Otos and his eternal fury of unrestrained desire,  
and Ephialtes, nightmare-demon that stole one’s breath away :

the sons of Aloeus. That very name makes me shiver.  
 His sons bound Ἴαρκος in chains and locked him in a  
 bronze jar for thirteen moons. Ἴαρκος, insatiable  
 for war, came close to death, caught in their chains and jar;  
 but the stepmother of those sons,—a beautiful  
 woman who birthed nasty sons—Eëriboea,  
 brought news to Hermes. And nothing gets past trickster  
 Hermes, who stole Ἴαρκος away, but still was caught  
 in the painful chains that contained him, and almost ended him.  
 But he stayed strong.”

And Dione caressed her daughter’s hair, and told her  
 other stories : of Hera and the three-barbed arrow  
 Heracles shot, which brought her great pain, but she stayed  
 strong; and the time that Hades himself required  
 medicine, when an arrow tore through his shoulder  
 amid the dead : but he, too, stayed strong : and Paean  
 healed him with his pain-killing herbs.

And still Dione caressed her daughter’s hair, and continued  
 to speak, and said :

“And now Athena has put that horrible man onto you.  
 He’s an imbecile if he thinks he’ll fight for long against us  
 and then get to one day hear his little ones prattle ‘papa’  
 at his knees, when he returns from his ‘mighty combat’.”

Thus spoke Dione soothingly, and continued, saying :

“I should say unbearable Diomedes, however mighty  
 of men, should fear that a woman, Aigialeia, his wife,



will wake everyone in her house with her weeping and wailing.

The daughter of Adrastus will be weeping for her husband,  
the 'best of the Achaeans', the noble wife of horse-stealing  
Diomedes."

And as she continued to speak, she wiped clean her daughter's arm  
and hand and wrist, and all the awful pain was healed.

Goddesses Athena and Hera, meanwhile, saw  
laughter-loving Aphrodite weeping and sulking,  
and took advantage of the moment. They challenged  
Zeus of-the-Lightning with bitchy taunting words.  
It was Athena Bright-Eyes who first spoke :

"Father," she said, "our Cypris must've been driving  
the Achaean ladies to lie with the Trojans,  
those dumb bags of guts she loves so passionately.  
I think while she was stroking the hand of one  
of the beautifully-robed Achaean women,  
she tore her wrist open on that lady's golden brooch.

But father, I don't wish to say anything to anger you."

Thus spoke Athena. Then the father of all things  
smiled, and summoned Aphrodite to his side.

"You are no warrior, my child," he said. "No!  
You encourage charming marriages, and gentle  
wedding nights. You do that. And leave this business  
to Ἀρης and Athena."

Thus, in this way, the gods spoke : with Aphrodite's head lowered, and Athena and Ἄρης smiling.

While Diomedes indomitable rushed at Apollo :  
 he saw in the gods' arms the destroyed body of Aeneas, and wanted to strip off the armour,  
 to persist in his offensive on the Trojans,  
 so he charged ahead, seeing nothing fearsome in Apollo, and Diomedes felt no fear as  
 he rushed at the god, who raised up his heavy shield and took the hammering of Diomedes' sword.  
 Apollo then swung at Diomedes, whose own shield caught the blow. One blow, then another, Diomedes wreaked on Apollo's shield, so bright as to be blinding, furious to kill him : but the god held him off.

So Diomedes fell back; then with a fearsome cry he ran on hard at Apollo, who held a hand up, and shouted at him with the voice of heaven :

"Think again, son of Tydeus. Withdraw. We're done. You are neither superior to the gods nor equal, and you will never be otherwise, and neither will we. You are only a man who walks on dust."

Thus spoke Apollo. And the son of Tydeus stepped back: just one or two steps, but still a retreat, opening up ground between them : contemplating the fury he'd heard in the voice of god Apollo, shooter from afar. And so he watched Apollo leave, with the body hanging feeble in his arms.

Apollo carried the body of Aeneas,  
 fallen soldier, away from the havoc of noise  
 and death. Aeneas was brought up into the city,  
 into Troy, where a temple issuing shining light,  
 temple sacred to Apollo, stood open for all the people.

The body was brought into the innermost part  
 of the temple : the private sanctuary of gods,  
 its walls and columns veiled with ornaments both  
 splendid and obscure. There, the mother of Apollo,  
 elegant Leto, and sister, arrow-sending  
 Artemis, seamed his bones together, and restored  
 his heartbeat. Then, they buckled his shield around him,  
 and rebuilt his armour. And then he opened his eyes.

And Apollo said to Ἄρης :

“ Ἄρης ! Ἄρης ! Man-destroying, blood-stained, murderous stormer  
 of cities! Go find that man, the son of Tydeus, he who  
 would now fight Zeus Father himself, and take him out of the fight.  
 He wounded Cypris, and charged at me, thinking himself a god.”

Apollo said this, then sat atop the lofty wall round Troy,  
 to watch.

And furious Ἄρης , cruel and destructive, flew through the ranks  
 of Trojan warriors, stimulating combat in the hearts  
 of the men. So the leader of the Thracians,  
 Acamas the fast-footed, addressed Priam's sons,  
 and said :

“Sons of King Priam, beloved of Zeus!

How much longer must we allow this slaughter

to continue? Until the Achaeans are at

the gate? Do you wish to fight them there?

They have cut down Aeneas, whom we thought

equal in honour to Hector δῖος ! ”

Such words he spoke inspired the courage and hearts of all the men.

And moreover Sarpedon upbraided Hector δῖος :

“Hector, where has all your strength gone? If I recall,

you said you’d hold the city simply with your brothers

and sisters’ husbands! You had no need of army

or ally! So where are these brothers and husbands?

I see here with us not one of those you spoke of!

They cower like dogs before a lion! Look round

the front and see who’s fighting for you. *We* are, your

allies—and nothing more than that. I’m from Lycia,

far distant Lycia, where the river Xanthus runs,

where I left my wife and little son, and everything

I own, defenceless against whoever wishes

to take it! While I fight here, encouraging

the Lycians warriors to fight. And I, too,

fight the Achaeans before me—though I’m protecting

nothing of my own here to be captured or stolen

away. So enough of standing here, preparing

ourselves to turn into spoil for prey to feed on!

Tell your men to get strong and defend their wives

and city, and do it now! Or your Troy will be

flattened to dust. Hector! You must rouse the allies,  
 who've come from afar, to be strong, and do it now!  
 That is your responsibility, night and day!  
 You must put away your silence, now, and speak out!  
 Then we will put away our strong disapproval."

Thus spoke Sarpedon, and his words stung Hector's heart.  
 Straightaway he dropped down from his chariot, his  
 plate rattling around him; and with spear in each fist  
 he marched hotly back and forth along the Trojan  
 lines, shouting at his warriors, encouraging  
 them to fight and make the awful noise of combat.

So the Trojan army rallied round, and turned  
 to face the enemy : and the Argives observed  
 their onslaught, but did not retreat.

Thus the two armies closed in for a second time,  
 twin immensities of foot-forces and chariots  
 inundating the Scamandrian plain, and all  
 the air was veiled in dust, and everyone there  
 was lost in the concealing night rising from the  
 earth. Each warrior advanced, yet could not see  
 the man ahead of him, so thick the dust-fog had  
 become, as furious Ἄρης rushed over the field  
 of battle, continuing to rouse the Trojan spirit.

And, drawing his golden sword, Apollo flew to  
 the Trojan side, when he saw his sister Athena  
 Bright-Eyes depart for the oncoming Achaeans.

A marching line of Trojan spearmen, meanwhile,  
made way for one more, Aeneas. All the Trojans  
beside him smiled when they saw him alive and  
powerful, and armed with courage. But no man spoke,  
for the lines were closing on "Ἀρης' man-destroying frenzy.

Even as the winnowing wind sifts the granary floor,  
when Demeter Earth-Mother separates the grain  
out, leaving the chaff-heaps growing ever-whiter :

just so, the dust-cloud rising up from the striking  
heavy hooves of horses turned the armies ever-  
whiter, as the dark swirling dust rose to heaven.

Then Athena waved away the mist, and the two  
armies saw each other : each a force of round shields  
and bristling spears.

Back on the Achaean side, the two Ajaxes  
and Odysseus and Diomedes rallied  
the Danaans to fight : but each warrior needed  
no further encouragement. Each felt no fear  
or misdoubt, but held full possession of their strength  
facing the oncoming Trojan army, and stood  
their ground in heart, just as Zeus' dark clouds colour  
over high-reaching mountain peaks when the air is  
dead-still, when the agitation of the North Wind  
sleeps, along with all the other violent winds that blow  
with howling noise, and scatter everything to and fro :  
even so the Danaans stood their ground against  
the oncoming Trojans, and did not flee.

And the son of Atreus Agamemnon strode along the lines,  
barking many commands :

“O friends!” he shouted. “Be men! Be brave in your heart!  
Or feel shame in the eyes of the men around you  
in combat! More men noble at heart live on than  
are killed! But cowards die one and all, and nothing  
remains of them! So be men! Be brave in your heart!”

Agamemnon shouted this out with brandished spear,  
then let fly ragefully, and impacted the shield  
of a friend to transcendent Aeneas : the son  
of Pergasus, Deïcoön. Him the Trojans honoured  
equivalent to the many sons of Priam  
because he fought at the front, always there to vex  
the foremost Achaeans. Him Agamemnon transfixed  
with his spear, which penetrated his shield and stuck  
his abdomen. The sharp bronze point ripped his stomach  
apart : so he fell to earth, and his armour clattered  
around him.

Then Trojan Aeneas took down two excellent Danaans,  
Crethon and Orsilochus, the sons of Diocles, who lived  
in spacious Pheme, a man of great wealth, whose race  
sprang from Alpheius, the broad river that rushes  
through the Pylian land; and king of men Orsilochus  
and brother Crethon were fighters skilled in many  
combat arts. In their prime strength of youth they sailed  
the black ships of Messenia to Ilium,  
land of grazing horses, following the Argive

fleet, to answer the injured honour of the sons  
 of Atreus, Menelaus and Agamemnon.  
 But there they reached completion, and went down to death.

Just as two lions raised on mountain peaks in deep  
 woodland, together leave their mother and come down  
 into the farmyards of men, and savage cattle  
 and goodly sheep : so Aeneas carved them to pieces  
 so you couldn't tell which was which any longer,  
 and these lay under the tramping feet of war, forgotten there.

Menelaus saw, incensed almost to madness,  
 and cut a passage through the warriors struggling  
 at the front to get himself close to Aeneas;  
 and Ἄρης kept raising his fury ever-greater,  
 so that he might fall before the hand of Aeneas.

And Antilochus son of Nestor saw the mighty  
 stride of Menelaus, and wildly pushed his way  
 through the raging front-lines to get to him, for he  
 feared this leader of men might be hard done-to, and  
 all their work would in his one last breath go awry.

He saw the two enemies facing off, Aeneas  
 and Menelaus, their spear-tips catching the sun,  
 ready to clash : and Antilochus came up beside  
 his commander-general, and took his stand. And  
 Aeneas, mighty warrior, raised his spear, then  
 stopped. When he saw the two of them set together  
 against him, Aeneas withdrew into the tumult,  
 and was gone.



So Menelaus and Antilochus took out  
their anger on the Trojans fighting at the front.

They cut down Pylaemenes, the great leader  
of the heavily-shielded Paphlagonians.  
Menelaus leapt up onto the back of his  
galloping chariot, and punctured his neck  
with his sword; while Antilochus pitched a stone  
directly at his charioteer, the unhappy  
Mydon, just as he was bringing the horses round,  
to flee, but Antilochus did not miss. He struck  
Mydon dead-centre in the elbow; and the reins,  
ornamented with inlaid ivory, fell from  
his hands, and skimmed loose along the dust. As Mydon  
looked up from his hands, Antilochus sprang onto him  
and ran his sword full in the face. Mydon, gasping  
out his life, tumbled back out of the chariot,  
but his bent knees hooked over the rim, and trapped him  
there hanging, with head and shoulders scraping along  
the dust, until some horses kicked his body away,  
and he fell to earth with a clatter. Meanwhile,  
Antilochus turned the chariot round again,  
lashed the horses, and sent them off into the Achaean lines.

But Hector kept watch on the men, and came screaming  
through the ranks, rushing at them, with many Trojan  
warriors following : and over all Ἄρης  
and Enyo brought uproar and confusion, and pitiless battle-death;  
War-Loving Enyo, shameless accumulator of corpses,  
sister and lover of Ἄρης . And Ἄρης raised a colossal

sword, and fury and frenzy filled everyone in front of Hector,  
and everyone behind him.

Diomedes saw all this coming at him with-  
out fear. As a man crosses a limitless plain  
only to stop at a fast-flowing river with-  
out resource to cross it, which flows on roaring in  
dashing course down to the salt sea, and seeing it  
roaring and boiling, steps back, and turns back,  
so Diomedes now turned, and spoke to his warriors :

“Warriors! Look, and marvel at mighty Hector δῖος !  
A daring spearman, and dangerous fighter!  
Wrongly we judged the Trojan army to be weak!  
I see Ἄρης in human form standing by him,  
defending him from death! Keep your faces pointed  
to the Trojans, but retreat! Do not fight the gods!”

But by the time he finished speaking, the Trojans  
were upon them, and Hector cut down two mighty fighters  
riding in one chariot, Menesthes and Anchialus.

And Telamonian Ajax saw the two men  
die, and when they fell to the ground, he swelled  
with woe and rage, and came close to the enemy  
and hurled his shining spear, and struck Amphius,  
son of Selagus, who lived in Apaesos, a wealthy man  
with ownership of many cornfields, but ill-fate  
inspired his contribution to Priam and his sons.  
His son felt a death-bringing spear insert itself  
in his abdomen, and he fell to earth. Ajax

rushed up to tear off his armour, and the Trojans  
 showered him with spears : a gleaming, deathly bronze rain :  
 but his shield trapped many of them. Then he set his foot  
 on the corpse, and yanked out the gory spear, then began  
 tearing off the ornamented armour, but spears  
 kept flying in from the Trojans, so he gave that up,  
 and flung the dead body aside. He contemplated  
 the new-hatched strength of the Trojans, and all the spears  
 and arrows and stones coming at him, as they fiercely  
 protected their fallen warrior. So, though he  
 was massive in size and strength, even wondrous to see,  
 he withdrew, holding his sword up before him as protection.

So the many warriors struggled in grisly combat.

And fate led Tlepolemus of Rhodes, son of Heracles,  
 a noble warrior massive in physique, to face godlike  
 Sarpedon, coming forward from the Trojans. When they came close,  
 one the son, the other the grandson of Zeus Cloud-Gatherer,  
 Tlepolemus, notorious murderer of family, spoke first :

“I know you—Sarpedon from Lycia. A ‘giver of counsel’.  
 Is it crucial *you* come cowering here, ignorant of fight?  
 They lie, all who call you son of Zeus. I see in you nothing  
 of his warrior bloodline, only weakness and cowardice.  
 Another sort of man they say was Heracles, my father.

Your mighty Troy fell once before, under his hand. Heracles,  
 answering your people’s idiocy, came like a lion  
 armed with single-minded fury and desolated your streets.  
 Don’t you know of the daughter of Laomedon and the ‘famed

horses of Troy'? Heracles came here with six ships and few men,  
and that was all he needed.

But you're a nothing, and your people are falling around you.  
You shall be no help to your friends from Lycia, nor to Troy.  
I come now to kill you."

And Sarpedon leader of the Lycians answered him :

"Hear *me* now, noble Tlepolemus!"

So Tlepolemus waited, and Sarpedon continued :

"Your glorious father Heracles," he said, "destroyed holy  
Ilium in answer to thoughtless, noble Laomedon,  
who refused to honour his service, by withholding the mares  
he had promised him, and for which your father had come from far.

Sound accurate to you? How about this? I shall slaughter you  
with these hands. My spear will take your life and drop it in Hades.  
There you can frolic through death with *his* magnificent horses."

So spoke Sarpedon, and Tlepolemus raised his ashen spear,  
and the two spears flew from their hands at once. Sarpedon struck him  
in the middle of the throat with his nightmare spear-point, and his  
eyes went blank. And Tlepolemus' spear struck Sarpedon  
on the left thigh, tore through eagerly and grated against bone;  
but his father just now defended his son from destruction.

Then his Trojan friends rushed in and carried godlike Sarpedon  
off the field of battle in such haste that they failed to first

draw out the long spear of ashwood sticking in his thigh, so that he might stand on his own two feet : and the pain he felt was great.

The mangled body of Tlepolemus, meanwhile, was dragged into the bronze-armoured Achaean lines. And Odysseus saw the dead body, and quivered with fury, but yet held back, wondering if rushing headlong after Sarpedon the son of Zeus Loud-Thunderer was best to do, or if he should just bring down a number of simple Lycians instead. But fate would not have Odysseus pursue Zeus' son with the sharp edge of his sword; so Athena Protectress turned his mind to bringing down a number of simple Lycians instead. Odysseus, therefore, took out Coeranus τε Alastor τε Chromius τε Alcandrus τε Halius τε Noëmon τε Prytanis. ὅς οἱ Odysseus would have killed more Lycians, but he was seen by fearsome Hector, his helmet glinting in the fray. Hector strode forcefully along the warriors at the front, his whole body glinting, and the Danaans he passed shivered with terror in his fiery presence, as he stalked Odysseus πολύμητις .

But, just then, the wounded Sarpedon, son of Zeus, put himself in Hector's path, and spoke out plaintively :

"Son of Priam, don't leave me here as food for birds! Please carry me away! As it is, I'd rather leave my life within your walls. It may well be that I shall never see my wife and son again. I've had all the pleasure of them I shall ever have."

But before Sarpedon was finished speaking, Hector was gone. Having given no answer, he rushed on eagerly, pushing

his own warriors aside to get to the Argives and take their lives, as many as humanly possible.

As for the godlike Sarpedon, his friends from Lycia took him beneath a magnificent oak tree, away from the fight. He sat down among the acorns, under the oakwood sacred to Zeus; and friend and fellow warrior Pelagon pulled out the ashen spear from his thigh. Then dark blood gushed out; and his life began rushing out with it; and a darkness began to cloud his eyes.

But then he took a breath : he breathed in, and then his life became trapped in his body again, and the lightly blowing North Wind ran freshly upon him, reviving him, and brought him back from light-headedness : and Sarpedon survived.

And the Argives, facing Ἄρης and heavily-armed Hector, neither gave ground and retreated to their black ships, but neither did they gain ground. They realised that Ἄρης now favoured the Trojans.

Who were the men now killed by Hector and furious Ἄρης ?

First, there was the excellent Teuthras; then, the charioteer Orestes; and then Trechus, warrior from Aetolia; and then Oenomaus; and then Helenus son of Oenops; and then Oresbius with sparkling belt-plate, he who lived in Hyle amid great wealth and its responsibilities on a fine estate than ran down to the Cephisian lake; and along that water's edge lived other wealthy Boeotians in a land wondrously rich and fertile.

Now high on Olympus, the Woman Above, Queen of Heaven,  
 the beautiful Hera, watched impatiently as the Argives  
 fell in such excessive numbers in battle without repulse;  
 so she turned to goddess Athena, and spoke with heated words :

“ὦ πόποι ! ” she said. “Athena Unwearied, child of Zeus!  
 Our promise to Menelaus will embarrass all of us!  
 We promised he would tear down the walls and utterly erase  
 Ilium from the earth, then sail home satisfied! We can’t  
 allow destructive Ἄρης to keep directing the frenzy  
 of battle in this way! Come! We must enter into the fight!”

Thus Hera, Woman Above; and Athena heard, and obeyed.

First, Hera, daughter of titanic Cronos, castrating God  
 of Time, set about preparing her chariot, harnessing  
 her horses in an exquisite ornamentation of gold :  
 and Hebe fitted a pair of eight-spoked wheels to the axle-  
 tree of iron under the frame; and their sparkling golden rims,  
 and tires of bronze, were indestructible, wondrous to see.  
 Each wheel-hub, where the spokes radiated from, were of silver,  
 and when the wheels went round all shone blindingly. The frame itself  
 glimmered with silver and gold, and the chariot-board  
 for riders consisted of interwoven springy leather straps.  
 A top-rail finished the rim of the curved frame all round.  
 Completing the chariot was a silver pole pointing forward;  
 at its end was the golden yoke, where the queen attached the straps  
 of gold around the necks and breasts of her marvellous horses.  
 Thus, then, was Hera eager for discord and the battle-cry.

And Athena Defender let her soft, clinging robe slip down

to the floor, an embroidery of astonishing colours,  
 her own hand-work, and stepped away from it. She put on instead  
 the armour of Zeus Cloud-Gatherer, readying for awful  
 war. She buckled her shield round her shoulders, the famous αἰγίς,  
 a tremendous shining round bristling with a hundred golden-  
 threaded tassels, a substantial defender terrifying  
 to contemplate. Embossed upon it were emblems of φόβος—  
 panic flight; of Ἔρις—hideous violence; of Ἀλκή—  
 pitiless courage; of Ἰώκη—the onslaught that freezes  
 the blood; and, amid it all, the Gorgon head, horrifying  
 omen of cataclysmic Zeus Decider. And with helmet  
 on she strode onward as if breathing flames of fire and stepped  
 up into her chariot. She seized her spear, huge and heavy  
 and strong, ready to obliterate whole lines of warriors  
 who displease her, the daughter of a mighty father.

Then Hera snapped the whip over the horses, and eagerly  
 they sprang like a crack of lightning onward : and in front of her  
 the gates of heaven, the passageway of dense, thick cloud, parted,  
 releasing a deep, prolonged rumbling thunder as they moved  
 aside to let her through. It was the Horai, solemn goddesses  
 of the air and circling seasons, who possessed the authority  
 in high heaven and Olympus to open these doors, or pull  
 them to. So the horses galloped through the corridor of cloud,  
 spurred by the spark of the whip on their backs, and came to the son  
 of castrating Cronos, sitting alone on the topmost peak  
 of the many summits of Olympus. There, Queen Hera, wife  
 to Zeus Highest, with queenly style delivered a question :

“Zeus Father! Have you no answer for Ἄρης and his horrid  
 work? He’s destroying the army of the excellent Achaeans



wildly, having no thought of my tears! While Aphrodite  
and Apollo, lounging at their ease and happy to watch this,  
are allowed to goad this madman to run wild, like a dog,  
who knows nothing of the old, established, customary laws!  
Zeus Husband, will you be angry if I strike Ἄρης sternly,  
and take him out of the battle?"

And Zeus answered :

"Set Athena Bright-Eyes on him. Indulge her habit of bringing  
more misery to him than any other power cares to do."

And that was Zeus' word, and Queen Hera did not disobey.

She lashed her horses, and spiritedly they galloped between  
earth and sparkling heaven. So far as a man on a hilltop  
can see to the far end of the wine-dark sea could the horses  
spring in one bound, high-neighing high above the mists of the earth.

And when they came to Troy, where the two rivers of the plain meet,  
the Simoïs and the Scamander, and run together as one,  
she stayed the horses, and loosed them, and rendered them invisible :  
and the river Simoïs sent ambrosia gushing up  
for the horses to feed on.

The goddesses flew as doves through the crazed lines of warriors,  
eager to defend the Argives. And they saw many of the best  
Achaean men, crowded together and jostling each other  
in battle, clashing like lions ravening each other's raw  
flesh, or wild boars, whose strength is not easily exhausted.  
There, where Diomedes stood prominent in the turbulence,

the voice of Queen Hera filled the air, emerging from the sea-shell, a hollowed spiral, lifted to the lips of the great-hearted Stentor, the indomitable-voiced herald of the people, who spoke as loud as the shout of fifty other men, and said :

“Come on, you unmanly, prettified cowards! If Achilles were here, the Trojans would be hiding inside the Dardanian gate! Why is it only his spear that terrifies them? Because now they fight far from the city, getting closer to our ships!”

So spoke Hera, and when the men heard this, each was roused at heart, and filled with strength.

And Athena Bright-Eyes flew to the side of the son of Tydeus, Diomedes, who had jumped from his chariot. Standing beside his horses, he was cooling off the wound in his shoulder from Pandaros' arrow. The sweat under his shield's leather strap, buckled across his chest from his right shoulder, irritated the wound, which had wearied his arm : so now he was holding the strap to one side, its leather clouded with his dark blood, and was wiping away the blood from his skin.

Then the goddess took hold of his horses, her hand on the cross-tree, and said :

“You are not much like your father Tydeus. He was compact in build, but a warrior, and could wage out-of-line war with lightning swiftness. Who doesn't know the tale of Tydeus and the Cadmeians? He had come from far, all alone, a stranger in Mycenae,

on an embassy to Thebe amid many Cadmeians;  
 and though I requested of him to rest at ease,  
 and be of good cheer, and enjoy the feast, he challenged every  
 last youth and man there, showing the undisturbable spirit  
 of the men of old, and won easily.

Because I helped him.

Now I come here to encourage you, and watch you.  
 I earnestly ask you to enter the fight with the Trojans!  
 But perhaps your fury in the fight has wearied  
 the son of Tydeus? and your arm sinks down now?  
 Or maybe you're scared. In that case you would most definitely  
 be smaller than your father Tydeus, the battle-wise son  
 of Oeneus, who loved pouring the wine."

And Diomedes answered her :

"I recognize you, daughter of Zeus, goddess of brightest eyes,  
 by your shield. To you I will speak my mind and not hold back.  
 Do you see me cringing in fear before you? Do you see any  
 cowardly hesitation in me at all, though I face your shield?  
 I still act on your command given me : 'do not fight face to face  
 with any Immortal—except Aphrodite'. You told me  
 to cut her if I saw her. But I also saw Ἄρης , with  
 the Trojans. So, I am withdrawing from the field, and have urged  
 all the other Argives to do the same—for as long as Ἄρης  
 Invincible commands the other end of the battle-lines."

And Athena Bright-Eyes answered him :

“Son of Tydeus, Diomedes, pleasing to my heart,  
fear no other, neither Ἄρης , nor any Immortal,  
so long as I am here to help you.

As for Ἄρης ,  
attack that impetuous madman! Charge at him  
with your horses and face him in hand-to-hand fight!  
We got to stop him! His all-encompassing rage  
has no boundaries. First he’s on one side, then he’s on  
another. Ἄρης is a two-faced, loner outlaw—who yet  
manipulates all men on earth!

Earlier he spoke  
with Hera and me, and implied he might demolish  
the Trojans, and support the Argives : and yet now  
he’s kicked you and those promises out of his thoughts.”

As she spoke she reached a hand out at Sthenelus, and pushed back :  
and he leapt from the chariot to the ground. Then Athena  
eagerly stepped up into the spot beside Diomedes.  
She seized the whip and reins, and drove the chariot toward Ἄρης .  
Beneath them the oakwood axle creaked and groaned  
as it turned under its burden of goddess and warrior.

Ἄρης , meanwhile, high on war, had just killed a mortal man  
for the only time in Homer, and was even now stooping  
to strip the dead of its armour. The warrior that Ἄρης had  
condescended to kill was the monstrously huge Periphas,  
the greatest of the Aetolians, Ochesius’ son.  
Bloody Ἄρης War God was tearing the armour from the body,

and Athena put on her robe of invisibility,  
so that the beastly Ἴαρκος did not see her coming

when he looked up to see the chariot of Diomedes  
bearing down on him. So the Man-Destroyer flung the body  
to the ground, and rushed at Diomedes. And when they were close  
to one another, Ἴαρκος raised his spear and let fly. It was  
a perfect shot, rising over the yoke and the reins, eager  
to take down Diomedes.

But Athena Bright-Eyes reached out  
and caught the spear with a hand, and flung it away aimlessly.

Diomedes then flung at Ἴαρκος his own bronze-pointed spear.  
And Athena Bright-Eyes leaned into it as the sharp tip raced  
into his lower belly, tearing through his immortal body;  
while mighty Diomedes sped away on his chariot.

So Ἴαρκος tore out the spear with a mighty scream, and snapped it  
in two, and his scream thundered louder than all the warriors  
merged with Ἴαρκος in combat. And all Achaeans and Trojans  
quivered in terror at the sound. The entire plain was seized  
with panic, so great was the roar of Ἴαρκος, insatiable for war.

Just as a dust-cloud appears darkly between earth and heaven  
when after burning heat a wind springs up, steamy and edgy :  
even so did Ἴαρκος give to Diomedes a baneful  
and uneasy feeling as the god shot up into the clouds,  
flying far and away into endless sky, and out of sight.

Straightaway he came to the space of the gods, high Olympus;

and he sat down with a vexed wince beside Highest Zeus Father,  
and showed him the immortal blood flowing from the hateful wound;  
and with woeful lament he spoke to Zeus Merciful :

“Father,” he asked, “I wonder if this gruesome sight enrages  
you. Always we gods must be quarrelling intolerably  
with one another, all the while showing goodwill to worthless  
man! You’ve exasperated us all to fury by bringing  
that senseless girl to being! She curses us continually!  
Athena’s mind is always hatching new acts of wickedness.

All the other gods who live on Olympus follow your word,  
and are respectful to you, each and all of us—except her!  
But no matter what she does you pay her no mind. In fact, you  
incite her! Because that destructive girl came from your own head.

Look at what that despicable, insulting ‘son of Tydeus’  
has done! With Athena helping him he’s now attacking gods!  
First he scratches Aphrodite on the hand by the wrist, now he  
charges at me as if a god himself! If I didn’t outrun  
him I might have caught some trouble. I might’ve been left paralysed  
from a rain of spears, lying there on a carpet of dead men.”

Then angrily answered Zeus Cloud-Gatherer :

“Don’t sit by me whining, you many-faced monster! I despise  
you more than anyone else on Olympus. Always you bring  
quarrel and war and riot. You’re too like your mother, our Hera,  
our barely endurable and too-stubborn Hera! Ah!  
I can hardly contain my own anger at the moment—I  
can barely speak! It is all from her suggestions, I am sure,

that you have come to feel this pain at your side.

However, I,  
and Queen Hera, cannot have our son in such a way. But if  
you had been the child of any other god I would let you  
suffer. You are so destructive, so uncontrollable, that you  
should be down with the lowest gods, not with the heavenly ones.”

Thus spoke Zeus, and requested of Paeon to heal his son’s wound.

So master healer Paeon administered pain-killing herbs  
to Ἄρης, and sealed the gruesome wound in the blink of an eye,  
as Ἄρης was made of nothing mortal. As quick as fig-juice  
thickens the white milk as a man stirs it in, just so swiftly  
did the wound of Ἄρης scab over then purify again.  
Then Hebe, sweet goddess of youth, bathed him,  
and dressed him in elegant garments. Then he sat  
down by the side of Zeus; and the pair was wondrous to see.

Then Argive Hera and Alalcomenean Athena  
returned to the palace of the great god Zeus, where they had sent  
Ἄρης, after bringing an end to his man-slaughtering work.

End of Book V

## Book VI

And so the gods for now abandoned the disagreeable  
 battle to the merely mortal men themselves, the Achaeans  
 and Trojans, who clashed across the wide plain, advancing fiercely  
 on each other, using bronze-tipped spears and two-edged swords, heavy  
 shields, and their bare hands, clashing between the river Simoïs  
 and the stagnant marshland of mosquitoes and crickets skirting  
 the waves of the endless sea.

Ajax, son of Telamon, was the first of the Achaeans  
 to weaken the Trojan onslaught, rousing hope in his fellow  
 warriors. Blood-soaked down to the soles of his feet, blood dripping  
 even from his eyelashes, stepping over the wounded writhing,  
 and the freshly dead, he grappled with Acamas, the best man  
 of the Thracians, Eüssorus' son, colossal  
 in size and courageous. But Ajax grabbed a spear and hammered  
 its bronze tip straight through his helmet and onward to his forehead  
 and did not stop but pushed on, shattering bone and entering  
 the brain : so his eyes misted, as man-eating death gobbled him  
 down to the underworld, which took his soul, but ignored the body,  
 which was left to rot, for all Hades cared.

In the turbulence mighty Diomedes saw Axylus  
 running through the Trojan lines, jumping over carved-up bodies  
 between lightning-quick spear strikes from the Achaeans. Teuthras' son,  
 he lived in beautiful Aribè, a wealthy man whom people  
 all over respected, for he used to welcome all manner  
 of men into his house, which stood by a highway, and entertain  
 them as guests. But not one of these guests was present to protect  
 him from a miserable death, when he came to meet screaming



Diomedes and his stinging sword : and he took not only  
 the one life but Axylus' charioteer Calesius'  
 as well : so the two went down below, more fresh souls for Hades.

And Euryalus killed Dresus and Opheltius, then chased down  
 Aesepus and Pedasus, whom the nymph Abarbarea  
 of the clear river waters birthed to noble Bucolion.  
 This Bucolion was the eldest son of ancient Trojan  
 king Laomedon, and therefore half-brother to King Priam,  
 yet was unknown as such, being the issue of a secret love.  
 Long ago Laomedon, while off in the fields, tending  
 his flocks, lay with the river Naiad in the grass, and she birthed  
 twin sons. These two Euryalus, son of Mecisteus, cut  
 down in gory rampage, and snatched their armour away.

On the dreadful field of battle, many a warrior died  
 of whom no record remains. Their names were lost along with their  
 wind-swift lives. And many a name noted just here are otherwise  
 unknown : Immovable Polypoetes killed Astyalus;  
 Odysseus' bronze spear killed Pidytes from Perkote;  
 and δῖος Teucer killed Aretaon. And Antilochus  
 son of Nestor put his shining spear through Ablerus; and king  
 Agamemnon killed Elatus, who left the heights of Pedasus  
 by the lovely river Satnioeis to die in the war.  
 The excellent Leïtus took down Phylacus as he fled from him;  
 and Eurypylus killed Melanthius.

And δῖος Agamemnon, his armour steaming with gore, rushed  
 to defend Menelaus : as Adrastus, screeching a war-  
 cry, came blazing over the plain, his cruel spear raised to bury  
 itself in Menelaus' body. But as he approached,

his two wildly galloping horses got their hooves entangled  
 in a fallen twist of tamarisk branches, and their strong legs  
 buckled, and the pole of the chariot snapped in two : while  
 the horses ran on, therefore, in wild terror toward the city,  
 where many a cowardly person was rushing in panic flight,  
 the broken chariot of Adrastus, before the eyes of  
 Agamemnon and his brother, flung over helter-skelter  
 and smashed to the earth, and Adrastus rolled out into the dust.

So the sons of Atreus strode to their would-be murderer, spear  
 poised in Menelaus' grip, while army commander  
 Agamemnon lifted his blood-slicked blade. But when they came to  
 Adrastus, he flung both his arms round Menelaus' knees,  
 and spoke :

"Sons of Atreus!" he said. "In the name of Zeus and all the powers!  
 Let me live, and I give you treasures beyond imagination!  
 Waiting for you in my father's store-room are valuables  
 of iron and bronze and gold, all of workmanship too lovely  
 to tell of! My father will gladly pay you a tribute beyond  
 number, if he hears I'm alive by the ships of the Achaeans!"

So he spoke, and, hearing this, the two brothers eyed each other :  
 and Menelaus was the first to speak, saying :

"If my servant isn't dead, he can lead him down to the ships."

But Agamemnon replied :

"Let this man's father enjoy his own valuables. Menelaus!  
 You would show kindness *now*? No. We will kill every one of them,

even the child embedded in the womb, along with its mother.  
One day we'll look, and see Troy gone, forgotten in sight and mind."

So he spoke, and, hearing this, the two brothers eyed each other :  
and finally Agamemnon sheathed his sword, and took the spear  
from his brother's hand, and drove it through the heart of Adrastus,  
and his long-voyaged body reached its end. Then Agamemnon  
stepped on the corpse for leverage, and pulled the bloody spear out,  
and handed it to his brother Menelaus, then went off  
into the flaring part of the battlefield.

Then, Nestor, teacher of men, yelled to the Argives around him :

"All Danaan warriors!" he shouted. "All friends of Ἄρης !  
Stop throwing yourself on the spoils, all you imbeciles  
competing to carry the most armour back to the ships!  
Kill everyone first! Collect your armour later, at peace,  
when all the Trojan corpses lie untroublesome on the plain!"

Thus spoke Nestor, and his fighting words encouraged all his men.

So the balance of slaughterous havoc tilted to Achaean  
once more; and they pushed at the Trojans, bold swords pummeling shields,  
driving them backward along the sanguinary plain; so whenever  
a warrior took a step on the soft, saturated soil,  
the footprint left behind him filled up with the wine-dark blood.

And son of Priam Helenus, watching his men struggling  
back toward walled Troy, where, he feared, their weakness  
promised them joyless destruction, marked a flock of birds crossing  
the sky, and read implications in the pattern of their flight.

Armed with this new knowledge, Helenus rushed to see Aeneas and Hector, and to these supreme commanders of the Trojans, their foremost prophet spoke out :

“You two!” he said. “Follow my pointing finger and I shall show you our approach of attack! This vision has been granted me! Listen!—or see our men be pushed to the city, and there be butchered in the arms of their wives, to delight our enemies!”

So he spoke, and, hearing this, the two leaders eyed each other : and Helenus continued :

“We must hold our ground here, and here,” he said, guiding their regard with gestures. “Go now, gather the warriors in these places I indicate, and compel them to fight through their weariness and stand their ground, or they will lose everything. *This* is the weight of necessity just now. You, Aeneas, go rouse the men and school them in our plan. I must speak one word more with Hector.”

So he spoke, and, hearing this, the two leaders eyed each other : then Hector nodded, and Aeneas ran off to his duties.

And Helenus continued :

“Hector, go up into the city and speak to our mother. Tell her to summon the grand ladies, and have all them gather at the temple of Athena. Our mother herself will unbolt the doors and lead them into the sacred rooms. Then tell her to choose the most charming robe on hand in her hall, whichever one our mother finds nearest to her own heart’s favour : this robe she will lay across the knees of the seated Athena Saviour.”

This he said, and Hector nodded, but Helenus continued :

“I feel that Athena was here, over the field of battle,  
but has left us, and we require her back : so you, Hector,  
will have our mother promise a sacrifice to the Bright-Eyed :  
twelve head of cattle, each a yearling innocent of the yoke,  
will be given to Athena Defender, if the goddess  
shows pity to Ilium and its mothers and their smiling  
babies, and holds off Diomedes from entering the city,  
the son of Tydeus, who rages like a wild animal,  
a mighty influencer of panic. I call him the best  
warrior of the Achaeans, and he has to be stopped.”

And as he was speaking Hector asked him :

“He is a warrior better than Achilles?”

And Helenus answered him :

“We have nothing to fear from Achilles—he’s not in the fight.

But I am unsure if we ever feared Achilles in the way  
we now retreat before this Diomedes, who slaughters us  
in a raging frenzy. No one on the field seems his equal.”

Thus spoke Helenus, and Hector bristled, but followed his word.

Hector, then, from his chariot, in full armour, sprang to the ground;  
and fearful was the rattle of the bronze upon his body  
as he moved through the lines of his army, his two sharp-tipped spears

raised high, to inspire his warriors, and urge them to fight :

“All great-hearted Trojans!” he yelled out. “All illustrious allies!  
Be men! Rouse your strength! Tear them apart! My friends, be courageous!

I go now into the city, to make prayer to the gods,  
to grant us strength to annihilate our enemies utterly!”

So he spoke, and kindled the battle-cry in his warriors,  
who rallied forward fiery-minded against the Argives,  
raising a terrifying shout over the whistling spears  
and clashing bronze swords; and the clamorous slaughter continued,  
till finally the Achaean army retreated, thinking  
one of the Immortals had come down from sparkling heaven  
to fight with them; and the Achaeans knew a fight with the gods  
was unwinnable.

So when the Achaean army redrew, a gap of earth was  
opened up between the antagonists. Standing opposite,  
each man breathed fury at the other facing across the way,  
exhausted, blood-soaked, yet still greedy to kill every last man.  
As for the Trojan warriors, Hector their leader was off  
the field, so as his men awaited orders to this new turn  
of battle, they lowered their spears, though kept ready to strike.  
And as the Achaean warriors themselves waited for orders,  
Agamemnon and Menelaus, commanders of the men,  
speaking in counsel somewhere in the dense crush of their army,  
had not yet delivered a response. So the gory-stained field,  
soiled in unspeakable carnage, in sudden calm, waited,  
and each man sent out heated waves of fury into the sky.

And into the gap galloped the chariot of Glaucus, son of Hippolochus; and against him came Diomedes, son of Tydeus. So from either end of the standing armies they converged, pulled their horses to, and halted their chariots. But, though eager to fight, neither warrior yet raised his spear. And both armies held their silence as the two warriors met.

And mighty Diomedes was the first to speak out, saying :

“You—one of the bravest warriors on this field : Who are you? Before now I had yet to see you in this fight. But here you are, come forward to face me in confidence, and you stand your ground boldly with the spear. But hear this, before you raise your weapon : Unlucky are those whose children meet my anger face to face.

But if you are an Immortal, you must tell me so. We men have learned not to challenge the invincible gods. Not even powerful Lycurgus, son of Dryas, could overcome them, even with all his strength. He offended wild Dionysius, so the gods took him down to the underworld. First they blinded him, however, simply to make him suffer. So I will not raise my spear against any god. But if you are a man, be afraid.

Come closer to me, if you dare, so you may learn just how quick a man can die.”

Then mighty Glaucus answered him :

“But I know you, son of Tydeus. And why do you ask me of my origin? I am a man, and nothing more than that. Just as the leaves that the trees scatter to the ground—such are men.”

And Diomedes replied :

“Winds do drop leaves down upon the earth, yes. Then trees breed anew,  
when the season of spring comes in its fullness.”

And Glaucus replied :

“As you say. One people come, but another first have to die.”

And as the two warriors glared at each other from their cars,  
Glaucus continued :

“If you would hear what you ask of, son of Tydeus : I come  
from city Ephyre, home of my ancestor Sisyphus,  
him whom people called ‘the artful one’. He fathered a son,  
Glaucus. He was father to the excellent Bellerophon,  
whom people said heaven granted him beauty and commanding  
manliness. Will you hear now what became of all this beauty?

Anteia, wife to king Proteus, took a mad desire  
for Bellerophon, whom her husband had just subjugated,  
with all his people, beneath his callous sceptre. So the hero  
was brought before the queen’s presence, and she would have him love her  
in secret, but Bellerophon, of the Argives, refused her  
advances, for his heart was too strong to be seduced by her.

So Anteia spoke lies to king Proteus. ‘You must kill Bellerophon,’ she said.

‘The man disgusts me. I was out, and he put his hands on me.’

So Proteus heard this, and ordinary revenge pleased him  
not at all, as such a rage had taken a hold inside him



for Bellerophon and all his people. So the king sent him,  
befriending him in outward fashion, to where the Xanthus swirls.

But there he put on this hero the fire-breathing Chimaera :  
goddess-born monster, no relation to men : a lion in front,  
tapering to a fluttery serpent behind, but in her  
middle, the body of a goat. From her open mouth she breathed  
out furious blazing fire. But Bellerophon killed her,  
for he could read the signs of the gods. But this great victory  
was but freshly born when the Solymi, the most ingenious  
people he ever had to fight, came in a swarm through the fumes  
of the vile beast. But he cut those men down, too. Then he met  
the match of men, a band of Amazons : yet another ambush  
he entirely eliminated. And then his sharp sword  
was sated, but the king wasn't finished : he weaved an ambush  
of the best and bravest of the Lycians : but not a one  
went home, for excellent Bellerophon killed every last man.

And for all that he became the king of Lycia; but time  
blinks an eye, and now he's wandering alone over the Aleian  
plain, and the Solymi have killed his son, and fair Artemis  
has killed his daughter : but I, son of Bellerophon, live still.  
Do you think he has sent me here not to be always the bravest  
and most distinguished among the others? I have now answered  
your question. And I shall not shame my family, the greatest  
of Ephyre and of widespread Lycia. That is who I am."

Thus spoke Glaucus. Mighty Diomedes, then, smiling, raised  
his spear, only to rest its sharp tip against the earth. He spoke  
mild words to Glaucus, leader of men :

“Long ago your father and my father were friends,” he now said.

“My father Oeneus received δῖος Bellerophon twenty days  
in his halls, giving him all the hospitality and friendship  
one might give to another. And each gave the other beautiful  
gifts. Oeneus presented a warrior’s belt of leather dyed  
a brilliant purple, and Bellerophon a two-handled  
drinking cup which even now stands prominent in my palace,  
there when I left for Troy. Thus it is I am a friend to you,  
and I hope to you in Lycia; so that if we ever  
travel in the other’s land, the one will welcome the other.

So let us lower our weapons from one another, even  
in the eyes of all these men, entire armies. For in yours  
there are many another celebrated Trojan and ally  
whom god may permit me to catch, and my hands to take away.”

So spoke Diomedes. And Glaucus responded :

“And many an Achaean in combat awaits death with these  
hands, too, god willing. But you and I : let us exchange armour,  
so all men here know we’re friends from our fathers’ days.”

So in this way they spoke with one another, then both men jumped  
from their chariots to the earth, and took hold of each other’s hand  
in friendship : and the gods above, some of them, laughed in mockery  
when the two warriors exchanged armour. For mighty Glaucus  
handed over a golden panoply, while Diomedes  
gave him his bronze : in truth the equivalent of an exchange  
of a hundred oxen for nine head of cattle.

Meanwhile, pre-eminent of Trojans, Hector,

had come to the majestic Scaean gate, where the  
 wives and daughters of the warriors on the field  
 crowded round him, by the tall oak, to ask after  
 their sons and brothers and friends; and of their husbands.

And Hector spoke :

“All good citizens,” he said. “Pray for victory.”

And many women dropped their heads in worry.

Then δῖος Hector went inside the city walls  
 and came to the lofty palace of his father,  
 King Priam. Rows of glimmering colonnades  
 of polished stone surrounded a central courtyard.  
 On one side stood the building where the king and queen  
 held residence : inside there were fifty chambers,  
 each of shining stone, and each built hard-by the next,  
 where the sons of Priam lay down to rest beside  
 their betrothed wives. While the daughters of Priam  
 inhabited the opposite side of the court,  
 a separate building of twelve sumptuous chambers,  
 itself roofed over and efficient in build, and bright  
 with polished stone : therein slept Priam’s sons-in-law  
 beside their goodly wives. So it was in this court-  
 yard that Hector came to meet his honoured mother,  
 the kind Queen Hecuba, who was strolling alongside  
 the most beautiful of all of her daughters, Laodice.  
 The queen pressed his hand to her heart, called him by name,  
 and spoke :

“My child!” she said. “Why have you left the battlefield?  
 Ah,” she continued, “our army has been worn down  
 to the walls, and those-people-who-will-not-be-named  
 surround us, and impress upon us, and we breathe  
 our last free breath! You have come to pour to the gods  
 with us one final time, in fidelity. I will go now  
 and bring us the honey-sweet wine.”

And to all this mighty Hector of the glinting armour replied :

“Mother! Bring us no wine. Nor do these unwashed  
 hands need pour to the gods just now; nor should a man  
 defiled in bloody dust make sanctimonious prayer  
 to Zeus Orderer. Please, queen of Troy, listen now,  
 and I shall say what you must do, as instructed  
 by your son Helenus.

Mother, go now to the temple of Athena,  
 and bring offerings to the god, with an escort  
 of the grand ladies of Troy. Choose your loveliest robe  
 for the temple, the one nearest to your own heart :  
 this robe you will lay across the knees of Athena.

You will make promise to Athena Defender :  
 twelve head of cattle, each a yearling innocent of discipline,  
 if the goddess shows pity to Ilium and its mothers  
 and their little babies, and holds off wild Diomedes  
 from entering the city—who rages like an animal,  
 a mighty influencer of panic. Mother,  
 go now to the temple of Athena.

I go now to summon Paris—if he will hear me.  
He woos the world to battle, then retreats to bed.”

So he spoke, and his kind mother released his hand.  
Then she walked among the halls and summoned  
her handmaids; who then went through the city  
and gathered together the grand ladies of Troy.

Meanwhile, the queen herself went down to a room  
under the house, a treasure-chamber redolent  
of incense, and went to the place of her garments.  
She admired her robes of elaborate embroidery,  
the elegant hand-work of Sidonian women, whom her  
Alexandros had brought back with him from Sidon,  
when he had sailed home with noble Helen over the sea.  
Queen Hecuba raised up the largest and most beautiful robe,  
choosing it for Athena Defender : she had brought it out  
from under the others, and it glittered like stars.

So, taking the robe with her, the queen went forth to the temple  
of Athena; and beside her were the grand ladies of Troy.

Together they advanced into the heart  
of the city, where the shining temple  
of Athena predominated. Its doors  
were drawn open for them by Theano,  
ethereal daughter of Cisseus,  
wife to the king’s wise counsellor Antenor.  
To honour her mastery of philosophy  
and mathematics, the people of Troy  
established her as priestess of Athena.

The temple air inside was a pleasing,  
 soothing congruency. But, lifting  
 their hands up high, the grand ladies let out  
 a cry to Athena : and during that,  
 ethereal Theano lifted her arms  
 up to receive the robe, and set it down  
 on the knees of Athena, Defender  
 of the city, murmuring to herself  
 reverently in prayer :

“Mistress Athena, possessor of Truth,  
 of all goddesses the δῖος : protect us :  
 shatter in pieces the spear of Diomedes—  
 and he shall fall face-first by our high gates!  
 May you bring this to be, most excellent  
 counsellor! We shall give a gift to you  
 of twelve innocent yearlings, if you show  
 pity on Ilium, and its mothers,  
 and its smiling babies.”

So prayed Theano.

But to all this Athena only raised her chin in contempt.

So, while the grand ladies prayed, mighty Hector  
 rushed to the sumptuous home of Alexandros,  
 a palace raised with Hector’s own two hands helping  
 the best of the Trojan artisans, a beautiful  
 sight in the city of dazzling views. They had built  
 for Alexandros the house, the reception hall,

the courtyard, and all additions, on a lush parcel  
settled by the palaces of Priam and Hector,  
within the city walls.

So Hector went in, spear held lightly in his hand,  
a slender lethality eleven cubits long.  
And as he moved through the delicate halls, his spear's  
sharp tip sparkling, and its lashing of wire,  
that fixed the bronze tip to the ashen shaft, shining  
as a thin gold band in the sunlight before him,  
he left not a scratch nor a tilt in the well-appointed rooms.

Hector found his brother in his comfortable,  
plush bedchamber, together with Argive Helen  
and her handmaidens. He was sitting with head bent  
to his exquisitely carved armour, polishing  
it all : his shield, his breast-plate; even his curved bow  
was there. Just as Helen was requesting of her  
handmaids this or that job for them to do for her,  
Hector stepped in, and looked on angrily, and spoke  
harsh and dreadful words :

"Fool! Do you not know your absence makes things worse for all of us?  
As for the prattle that redounds on me, no matter of that  
for now. Do you not understand the army's getting wasted  
out there? and the combat comes ever closer to the city walls?  
All this is your mess, and you sit here cleaning your toys?  
What if I were you stepping into here, to see  
this abominable sight, when all your brothers  
and friends are out there struggling in the fight? Stop this!  
Come with me now and help keep the city from ruin!"

And δῖος Alexandros, formed as beautifully  
as a god, answered his older brother, carefully :

“Hector, your words are just, yet only descriptive  
outwardly. Yes, I sit in my bedchamber, from shame.  
I haven’t yet forgotten what happened before all the men.  
Even so—your words are just. But just now, my wife  
spoke gentle motivations to move me to battle,  
and I agreed; and as you came, I was preparing  
to go, as victory may turn on a single man.  
So come now! Why not take a seat while I get  
into my armour; or go, and I’ll be with you  
soon. Ah, I’m certain I’ll surpass you in battle!”

So spoke δῖος Alexandros, and to it all  
his brother, standing in his gory battle-plate,  
said not a word.

Then, gently, to calm Hector’s anger, Helen spoke :

“Ah, brother,” she said. “I’m the malicious bitch that started this,  
horrible to look at! I see the day my mother gave birth  
to me, and a breath of wind lifts me on its wings, off and away  
to a mountain somewhere, or it releases me into the sea,  
and I never come to be, and these things never come to be.

And yet the gods fix the way of all things—so that would include  
all these evils. Funny that an infatuation brought us here.”

And to this neither Hector nor Alexandros gave answer,



so Helen continued, and said :

“But just now I was saying, right before you came in, that I deserved a better man as husband—one who can read for himself the judgment of men, and not *stay* a shame and disgrace! But the spirit of this man is a wandering one : it floats among the clouds, and the light of the high air dims his sight. I fear that down on earth his blindness will bring ruin.”

And to this, too, neither Hector nor Alexandros replied, so Helen continued :

“Come now! Why not enter in properly, and sit down on this chair? Ah, great Hector, you have suffered most of all from this god-brought infatuation—because of your brother’s affinity with dog-faced me! Zeus has set an evil fate on all of us. In days to come they’ll sing songs about us.”

Then Hector, his bloody armour rattling, answered her :

“I am not sitting down. Though you may love me dearly, Helen, I must go and defend the city from utter destruction. I must go and bring aid to my fellow Trojans. So you rouse your husband to ‘surpass me’ on our way to the battlefield, and we may meet before I leave the walls. Because I have one more place to go—home. I must see my wife and little son. It may be the last I ever see of them. And for all I know some Achaean may cut me down before I even get there.”

So said Hector, and left the room. Quickly he came  
to his shining palace, only to discover  
his dear wife Andromache missing from his halls,  
and his child, too. So he rushed to the threshold,  
and looked out and around, and spoke loudly to all  
the house-women, saying :

“Come, women,” he said, “tell me now, and tell me straight :  
Where is Andromache? Why is my wife not here?  
I can think of a few places she could be : she’s  
with one of my sisters, or with my brothers’ wives,  
or she’s gone with the escort to the temple of Athena.  
Which is it?”

And so his conscientious housekeeper spoke out :

“Hector,” she said, “as you say, I hear and answer.  
Your wife is not with one of your sisters, or with  
your brothers’ wives, nor has she gone to the temple  
of Athena with the escort praying for deliverance.  
Andromache has gone to the Wall, and I think  
she may be up high, looking out over the field.  
When she heard of the Trojans’ distress in the fight,  
and of the overwhelming Achaean army  
cutting our numbers down, she rushed out with the child  
in mad terror, and could not be stopped. So the nurse went with her.”

So she answered, and Hector left the house at once.  
Quickly he retraced his steps over the well-paved  
streets, moving armoured through the wide, spread-out city.

When he came to the gate, the Scaean gate, he looked  
through and saw the plain, and thought of rushing to fight—

when he saw his wife running to meet him.  
Lovely Andromache, the elegant daughter  
of great-hearted Eëtion, who once was king  
over the men of Cilicia in Thebe,  
under the mystical forests of Mount Placus.  
It was his fair daughter that Hector had married,  
who now stood before her in his bloody armour.

But Andromache came close and threw her arms round  
her husband, and man and wife embraced. And he saw  
the nursemaid standing behind her, holding his son  
Scamandrius, just an infant, and well-beloved  
of Hector, as fine as a star. And Hector smiled.  
He looked at his son in silence while his wife  
wept on his shoulder.

Then, joining their hands, she spoke to him, and said :

“Dear man, I was scared you were dead. Hector!  
How terrible is courage! Do you not  
pity your little son, who has not yet  
said your name? Ah, unlucky star that burned  
over my birth! Would you have me a widow?  
We all see that army coming—they will come  
and kill you! I shall not let you go alone.  
It were better for me to go with you  
down under the earth, if you must go first;  
for I will have no more happiness here.

My father and mother are dead. You're all I have."

And as Andromache clung to her husband, she continued :

"That disgusting Achilles killed my father!" she said,  
dropping her head on her Hector's shoulder. "He came  
crashing into our city just to steal everything,  
into beautiful Thebe, and killed many of my people.  
Just to take things. But he didn't take my father's  
armour off his body. That's one thing he didn't take.  
Whether he respected the height of my father  
the king, or for whatever reason, he ignored  
my father's armour, which I remember was very  
beautiful, carven all over with delicate fineness.

Achilles burned the body and all the armour,  
and my father was buried. I saw mountain nymphs  
come down to plant what later rose up as elm trees  
all round the tomb : the daughters of God Zeus, who lets  
all things happen. All my seven brothers died by  
Achilles' hand, who moved quickly, very quickly.  
All their bodies lay there by the cattle and sheep,  
while their souls had gone down to Hades.

My mother!

She he took with him—though his arms were already  
well full of our treasure—she, the queen of Placus  
Mountain! But he kindly her let go when we who  
still lived gave him even more of ourselves, our gold  
and silver, whatever was left to us. But she died,  
of a broken heart. They say it was Artemis

who shot the arrow of pity that took her life  
from me.”

And Andromache held her husband tighter to say :

“No, Hector! You are my father and my gracious mother now!  
You are my brothers to me; and you are my beautiful husband.  
So come! Think of me, and stay by my side within  
the city. Don’t make your wife a widow and your son an orphan.

The army that comes—keep them behind the fig tree.  
The wall after it is unsafe, and the city  
is open there to invasion. Three times now they’ve  
almost come over, and it took you to stop them.  
I know their names now. Ajax—the two Ajaxes.  
The sons of Atreus. Idomeneus, a name  
everyone knows—now. And the son of Tydeus,  
whom even you warn us all of. Three times now they’ve  
almost come over. Maybe they have a prophet  
who sees well, or maybe they’re just too strong to stop!”

Then Hector answered her :

“Andromache,” he said, “you’re always in my thoughts,  
but I have no choice, and you know that : I command  
all the men, and how would it look if their leader  
crept away from the field to hide among the Trojan  
women in their gentle robes? In truth, you and I  
know I have no other choice in my heart but to fight :  
every grain in my body compels me to stand  
at the front-line to protect the women of Troy,

with my sword, my spear, and my bare hands. If I fight  
as my father fought, I will know the feeling of great  
glory.”

And Hector stopped, then began again :

“My love, let me tell you what’s in my heart. Even  
as I fight, and push, still I still the day, I don’t  
know why, when Troy will be reduced to dust,  
our beloved city, gone—my father, and all the people.  
Why would I see that, unless it were truth yet to be?  
I feel the grief of the Trojans, and see dead the king  
and queen, my mother and father. And all my brothers,  
dead, dropped to the dust by the bronze-armoured ones.  
Yet all that pain is as light compared to what I see for you.”

Again Hector stopped, and Andromache waited, then he said :

“I see, through your own tears, your last day of freedom.  
I see you weaving at the loom of some Achaean  
master. I see you stolen away to Argos,  
or to Messeïs, or to Hypereïs, to bear  
water, at the bidding of some other woman.

And someone will see your tears, and say, ‘she was wife  
to Hector, the “bravest” to fight of all the “horse-  
taming” Trojans, back when men fought around the city of Troy.’

So they will say that. For giving grief is the great  
trade of humankind. At that time, as your tears come  
you will think of your lost husband who should have

defended you from your unhappy fate.

So let me be dead! Let me lie covered by earth.

So I can't hear your cries as they carry you away."

Thus spoke Hector, who then raised his shining helmet to his head,  
and reached out for his son. But the child recoiled  
in terror at the sight of the shimmering tuft  
of horsehair, cresting in terrible colours over  
the man's eyes; and buried his face in his nurse's breast.

And his father and mother couldn't help but laugh,  
and Hector removed his shining helmet and put it  
on the ground. And then he took his much-loved son  
into his arms, and kissed him, and prayed to all the gods :

"Zeus, make my son strong, and good, and among the best  
of the Trojans, so that one day he may come forth  
from the punishing battlefield and men will say  
of him, 'He is far better than his father was.'  
And may his mother be happy at that."

So he spoke, and laid his son in Andromache's  
arms, who brought her child to her sweet-scented breasts,  
smiling through tears, and it hurt her husband's heart  
to see it. So he took her in his arms again  
and called her by name, and said :

"Marvellous woman! Please go back now to the house,  
and look after our son. All will stay solid  
—until I can help things no longer. Certainly

I shall not go untimely. I've yet to meet the man  
in battle who's beaten my hand. Go now to the house;  
see to all things there. My only way forward must be to war."

This he said, then brought his helmet up to his head.  
So his wife turned round and began to walk away.  
But then she looked over her shoulder, to see her  
man-killing husband standing in his dusty armour.  
And as she walked on, she kept turning round to see,  
until the time she looked, to find her husband gone.

When Andromache returned home, all of her handmaids  
saw her tears; and in reply all burst out in cries  
of sorrow. Yet they mourned a man who was not dead.

But Andromache mourned, too. Because she never  
expected to see her husband alive again,  
for all of Troy knew of the strength of the Achaean army.

Meanwhile, Alexandros had quickly got into  
his armour of ornamented bronze; then hurried  
through the city on swift feet, heading to battle.

Just as a horse, though comfortably stabled  
and well-fed, yet breaks free, and gallops exhilaratedly  
over the plain, and comes to the fair-flowing river,  
where it loves to bathe, and stands proud in its freedom,  
with head held high and mane fluttering at its shoulders;  
and its legs then lead it to the feeding ground of mares :

just so did carefree Alexandros come down from lofty Troy,



walking in the fiery sun that danced upon his armour,  
all the while laughing in freedom as he went on his way.  
And he found his brother, the godly Hector, at the city gate,  
about to head down to the plain, and enter into the fight.

And Alexandros spoke to him, saying :

“Ah, dear brother, I fear I’ve kept you waiting here,  
though I came quick as could be—though not as quickly  
as you would have preferred, evidently.”

And Hector in his glinting helmet answered him :

“Brother,” he said, “the men on the field saw you fight  
with courage, and they respect you for that; but you’re  
too readily idle and careless. I have to hear the men  
speak shamefully of you, when they wonder where you are,  
the reason of all the fighting; and that stings me very much.

But let’s get the hell out of here. We’ll worry about that later.

That is—if Zeus allows us to. Perhaps it shall be that the gods  
allow us to put a mixing-bowl of victory in our halls,  
for all to drink from, once we’ve driven off the strong-armed Achaeans.  
Well, let us go.”

End of Book VI

## Book VII

“With these words”—a brilliant opening by translator Samuel Butler in 1898—illustrious Hector, together with Alexandros, his brother, rushed through the city gates, eager for the fight and the sound of combat.

Just as rowers, wearied of driving the oar, sigh with pleasure as a favourable wind sweeps in from a god, and then relax their arms on the smooth firwood oars : just so, the two warriors brightened at the sight of the battle on the Scamander plain.

And all the Trojans cheered to see Hector arrive.

So Alexandros struck first : he unsheathed his sword and carved up Menesthius from Arne, the son of king Areithoüs the mace-man, and the fair-eyed Phylomedusa. So Hector ripped through Eiöneus’ throat with his piercing spear, from behind, and his eyes went blank. So Glaucus, son of Hippolochus, Lycian chief, threw his spear at Iphinoüs, Dexios’ son, as he raised himself onto his chariot to take the reins, but was hit in the shoulder, so as his horses bolted he tumbled off and rolled in the dust : then went further : he went down beneath the earth.

But far above the battlefield, up in highest Olympus, Athena Bright-Eyes observed the Trojans routing the Argives,

for her curiosity for the struggle was unbridled;  
 so in an instant she stepped down from the peaks of Olympus  
 onto the Trojan plain and into the battle assurgent.  
 Then Apollo, watching from high-walled Troy, accelerated  
 to her side; and she knew her brother supported the Trojans.  
 So the two met by the oak tree overlooking the Scaean gate.

And Apollo Far-Reacher spoke first, saying :

“Why yet again are you here, Daughter of Good Health?  
 What tells your heart to come see a senseless slaughter?  
 Perhaps you’re here to impress your thumb down  
 on the scale of victory—for the Danaans?  
 Since you show not a jot of pity for the Trojans.

So hear me now, and it will go better for your friends.  
 We shall let them rest from war and struggle—for today.  
 Tomorrow let them fight their way to their fixed destiny.  
 It doesn’t concern me; let them fight their way till Troy is dust.  
 It’s obvious that its obliteration appeals to you goddesses.”

And Athena answered :

“Have it your way, Shooter. You may be right. In fact  
 you are. I have come from Olympus to be with the men,  
 both Trojans and Achaeans. So come then! Tell how  
 you shall separate the warriors, and have them  
 sit in silence each on their side?”

And Apollo replied :

“We’ll rouse heroic Hector, and maybe he’ll face off  
in single combat : a face-to-face meeting in between  
the two armies; they like that sort of thing. Have him  
fight anyone you want; you choose the degree of struggle.  
Let some angry bronze-armoured Achaean come, eager to match  
man-to-man with Hector δῖος in battle.”

So he spoke, and Bright-Eyed Athena agreed with Apollo.

So as Hector re-entered his battle-lines, the visionary  
Helenus, this time, achieved accurate sight : he saw the will  
of the gods; then sought to satisfy their pleasure, so he went  
to his brother Hector and related his dream-vision, saying :

“Hear me,” he said, “for I have heard the will  
of the gods. They would have all warriors  
lower their weapons, and themselves, to the earth,  
and sit still, in peace. Such would please the gods.

After you’ve complied with this part, next you’re  
to call out to the Achaeans to send forth  
their best, to meet you in face-to-face fight.

But Hector, here’s the root of the matter :  
your fate is not to fall just now. You can’t  
lose; for I have heard the forever-born gods.”

So when Hector heard this from Helenus,  
he smiled coldly.

So he went among his men, Hector, leader of the Trojan

army, and raised his spear high, but laterally, gripping it by the middle; then lowered it slowly : a sign for the men to sit. So all the Trojan lines sat down; and Agamemnon, in answer, likewise commanded the Argives to be seated.

And Athena and Apollo likewise sat down, but as vultures, settling their talons on the highest branch of the broad oak tree dedicated to Zeus Orderer. They looked on with perverse delight at the warriors of men, arranged in crowded rows of shields and helmets and spears. Just as when the West Wind pours itself into the sea and its ripple creasing the surface darkens the deep under it, so sat the lines of Achaeans and Trojans on the plain.

Thus, standing in the gap between the two armies, Hector spoke :

“Hear me,” he said, “all Trojans and well-armoured Achaeans, that I may speak my mind. High-thronéd God has ignored us, our oaths and promises; and we have been led to this position of great indeterminacy, which promises us a time, its duration unknown, of evil suffering, for all of us, Trojan and Achaean alike; until you tear down the walls of Troy, or are yourself cut down by your sea-going ships.

So I see before me now the best of the Achaeans.

Let he who wishes come forward to fight against Hector.

Thus I shall say, with everything as my witness :

if your man take me down, with sword, spear, axe, whatever, take all my armour, too, and carry it to your black ships.

But hear the following, and there shall be reciprocation :

allow the Trojans to take my body, so the Trojan wives  
may lower me into the fire.

But if I take *him* down, if Apollo grant me victory,  
his armour will come to hang in the temple of Apollo  
within the walls of Troy. But the Achaeans will be allowed  
his body, to give him due burial, and raise him a tomb  
by the well-travelled Hellespont. And in distant time to come,  
a rower on the benches on the wine-dark sea  
shall turn to the next, and say : ‘That was a man who died a long  
time ago, killed in battle by the illustrious Hector.’

This they will say. And my fame will never die away.”

So he spoke, and the Achaeans before him sat in silence,  
ashamed that no one had arisen to meet Hector’s challenge;  
for they feared him, the best of the Trojan warriors. Finally,  
Menelaus stood up and addressed his reluctant warriors,  
chastising them with harsh words of anger; and uneasy groans  
rushed through his battle-lines as he spoke out, saying :

“ ὦ μοι ! What am I looking at? You arrogant men are men  
no more, but the women of Achaea! This shame upon you  
is a preposterous horror which I never thought I’d live  
to see. Not one of us goes forth to face the sneering Hector?  
May all you good-for-nothings rot back into dust and water  
while you sit there as if already dead, you spiritless  
cowards! Is that how it is? So be it! I will fight him myself.  
Bring me my arms and armour, anyone! You can all watch me  
fight, you insufferably moaning weaklings! You, and all the  
Immortal gods, can watch me bring this war to its conclusion!”

Thus spoke Menelaus. So his army watched as he put on his armour. But Menelaus knew very little about the Immortal gods, for he was ready to walk to his death unwittingly, since Hector was the far stronger and better fighter of the two. So it was that “preposterous” army you mocked, O Menelaus, who saved your life, when its leaders rose up and laid hands on you and forcibly held you back.

So Agamemnon king of men gently took his brother’s hand, and said :

“You’ve gone mad, my brother, and the words you speak seem not your own. Beloved of Zeus, restrain yourself—however angry, and perhaps rightfully so—and think for a moment. Many a man of our army shudders to think of facing Hector. Even Achilles hesitates to fight him, though glory everlasting awaits the winner; and you well know that he is a far better fighter than you. Please, my brother, sit down with the army. We shall work this out; one of us will soon rise to fight—and once he starts, he’ll fight not so much to win, but to stop, and to bend his knees to the ground in welcome weariness.”

Thus did Agamemnon successfully change his brother’s mind, for what he said was reasonable. So Menelaus had his attendants remove his armour from his shoulders, and all the while he said not a word as they did so.

Then Nestor stood, and spoke in exasperation :

“ὦ πόποι ! I see bad times for our

beloved Achaea, which ails in weakness!  
 I hear the great warrior Peleus, horse-breaker,  
 mighty king of the Myrmidons, and the father  
 of our own powerful Achilles, groan, groan, groan!

I once enjoyed the honour of visiting his home,  
 and I recall him—a most excellent speaker, artist  
 of thought—smiling most pleasurably as we  
 spoke of the birth and lineage of the Argives.

What if Peleus saw us cringing before Hector?  
 He would demand of the Immortals to rip his heart  
 from his chest and fling him down to Hades!”

All this Nestor said, then continued for a time :

“O Zeus Father! Athena and Apollo! If you  
 would only give me back my youth! Just one more time,  
 the time the Pylians and fierce Arcadians  
 fought at the walls of Pheia, clashing between two rivers,  
 the rushing Celadon and the many streams of Iardanus.  
 The Arcadians sent forward terrifying,  
 tremendous warrior Ereuthalion, whose  
 shoulders wore the armour of King Areithoüs,  
 δῖος Areithoüs, whom they called the ‘mace-man’,  
 because you never saw him fight with bow or spear,  
 but with a battle-mace of iron that broke whole lines.

Listen now how Lycurgus overmastered Areithoüs,  
 through trickery and not through strength, and took  
 his armour from his body. In the heavy fighting,



the clever Lycurgus drew Areithoüs in-  
 to a narrow corridor of rock, which baffled  
 the swing of the mace. So, as Areithoüs tried to attack,  
 Lycurgus slipped a sharp spear through his middle,  
 and down fell the king on his back upon the earth.”

All this Nestor said, then continued :

“So Lycurgus stole all his armour, and wore it  
 against the enemy in all of his battles ever  
 after; and, when he grew old in his halls, he gave  
 the armour to his attendant Ereuthalion  
 to wear; and in this armour he overmastered  
 many a great man—but not me.

There were many among me

lacking courage to meet that champion, but shuddered  
 instead, and cringed in dread. But I had the courage,  
 for I was young and strong and let loose in war to  
 go wild. Courage! I loved the boldness of it,  
 the audacity! And of all those warriors  
 I was the youngest! So I fought him, and Athena  
 gave me the glory of victory. He was the largest  
 and most powerful man I ever killed. Stretched  
 out this way and that on the earth he looked massive,  
 like an island sprawling on the waves. If only  
 I had my youth back just one more time, with the strength  
 I had, then one of us would soon come face to face  
 with Hector ‘of the glinting helmet’! But the rest  
 of you, the best of the Achaeans, sit careless  
 of the challenge. Perhaps the glinting helmet scares you?”

All this Nestor said angrily, and nine men stood up.  
 First to rise was king of men Agamemnon,  
 then rose the son of Tydeus, mighty Diomedes,  
 then the Aiantes, radiating monumental strength,  
 and then Idomeneus, and Idomeneus'  
 attendant Meriones the bloodthirsty one,  
 and after them Eurypylus, valiant son  
 of Euaemon, and also the son of Thoas leapt  
 to his feet, Andraemon, and δῖος Odysseus :  
 and each man was ready to fight Hector.

Thus Nestor spoke :

“We will shake stones in a helmet and leave the choice  
 to destiny. Our man will bring to the Achaeans  
 an inestimable advantage, and to himself  
 the greatest of glory, if he survives.”

So he spoke, and each man marked his stone with a sign,  
 then tossed it into the helmet Agamemnon  
 held out. And the army raised their hands to heaven  
 in prayer, and one would say to the wide blue sky :

*“Zeus Father, may it be Ajax’s stone that falls  
 from the helmet, or Diomedes’;—or else  
 Menelaus’, king of golden Mycene.”*

This they would say. Meanwhile, Nestor shook the stones  
 in the helmet, and let one spill randomly out on the earth.

A minister took the stone between his fingers  
 and went through the line of warriors, displaying it,  
 left to right, for each leader to see; but each man  
 who saw the stone shook his head. But when he had brought  
 the stone all the way down the line, the man who had  
 scratched on it and tossed it in the helmet now held  
 out his hand, the famous Ajax; so the minister  
 came close and gave him the stone. And Ajax smiled  
 to see his sign etched upon the stone, then flung it  
 in the dust, and spoke :

“Friends,” he said, “I am the one, and am happy to hear it,  
 for I expect to tear ‘ δῖος ’ Hector limb from limb. So come now!  
 Pray to Zeus—but in silence, where each man stands, so  
 the Trojans will not hear your appeal. On the other hand,  
 let them hear, since we fear no one living. No man,  
 through his strength, even through strength made stronger  
 by experience, will force me backwards against my will.  
 I shall show them the force of the fighter from Salamis.”

Thus spoke Ajax, who then prayed to Zeus; while one  
 or another man would say to the wide blue sky :

*“Zeus Father, atop the peak of Ida most powerful,  
 hear this prayer, and give victory to Ajax! Raise him  
 to everlasting greatness! But if you favour Hector  
 —at least allow them to contend with equal strength.”*

This they said while Ajax got into his shining armour.  
 Then, with bronze-plate protecting his body, he strode  
 confidently to the head of the battle-lines,

reminding his men of the terror of Ἄρης ,  
 when the war-god comes to fight among warriors  
 whom Zeus Orderer has joined in man-destroying  
 combat, to test them, to see if they'll stand their ground.  
 Ajax conjured such a terror, this huge defence  
 of the Achaeans, while he smiled and entered  
 into the gap between the two armies; and his  
 long spear cast a deathly shadow onto the earth.

And the Argives rejoiced to see their man there, but  
 a terrible trembling quivered through the Trojan ranks;  
 even the heart of Hector knocked inside his chest.  
 But there could be no turning back for him, for it  
 was he who had invited this huge man eager  
 for combat, now standing facing the Trojan lines.

Ajax had come near, and the Trojans admired  
 the immensity of his shield, thick as Troy's wall,  
 seven layers of ox-hide dried and sewn together,  
 then reinforced with a top-layer of metal  
 nailed in, the hand-work of the master armourer  
 Tychius, greatest of all artists of leather,  
 who lived in Hyle, and who had used for all seven  
 layers the shiny hides of the mightiest bulls,  
 then drove in over them the eighth layer of bronze.

This colossal shield Ajax now held before him,  
 while he stood exceedingly close to Hector.  
 Finally, Telamonian Ajax spoke, threateningly :

"Trojan, I have 'come forward to fight against Hector'.

Now you shall see, man to man, of the might of the Danaans.  
 Even without army-breaker Achilles, who,  
 though lion-like, lazes indifferent by his ships,  
 giving Agamemnon the full edge of his rage.  
 But many another of us are willing to fight you.  
 So start with me when you will."

And Hector answered him :

"Ajax," he said, "son of Telamon, a leader  
 of your army. Don't use feeble words to scare me,  
 as to some little boy innocent of the works  
 of war. You're not the only one experienced  
 in the slaughter of men. You see I have a shield,  
 too, and I, too, can move it left or right, and catch  
 the blow with its tough ox-hide. You walked up to me  
 because you may have seen me charging into close  
 combat that Ἄρης enjoys to watch; I cared not  
 for the chariots rushing past me, with their spears.  
 And have no fear, Ajax : I don't need trickery  
 to overmaster you. Openly I shall win."

With these words Hector drew back his death-bringing spear  
 and let fly : and the sharp bronze point struck Ajax's shield  
 and pierced its outermost metal and drove through six  
 layers of the shiny bulls' hides, only to be stopped  
 by the seventh, the final defence. Now Ajax,  
 with the enemy spear sticking out insolently  
 from his heavy cover, let fly his own killing  
 spear, and its shadow crossed the gap quicker than sight;  
 and Hector felt his perfectly round shield shudder

from a direct hit. The spear-point tore through its layers,  
 then on through his breast-plate, forcing its way forward  
 toward his rib-cage, with only his tunic as defence  
 now from death. But as quick as a shadow Hector  
 knocked the spear off its path, and away; so the son  
 of Priam escaped a terrible fate.

Then each came forward, reached out, and tore out his spear  
 from the other's shield; then quickly retreated, as lions  
 or wild boars eye their raw prey, confident in their strength,  
 and not easily exhausted.

Hector then punched his spear squarely in the middle  
 of Ajax's shield, but its hard spear-point bent sidewise  
 and useless; and Ajax leapt forward, tossing up  
 his spear and catching it by the spike; the Argive  
 hero jumped upon Hector and made him step back,  
 and Ajax swiped his spear-tip along Hector's neck,  
 and breathed contemptuous fury into his face,  
 and saw the dark blood appear along Hector's throat.

But the wound was only a graze, and δῖος Hector,  
 feeling the blood on his neck, struggled himself free  
 from Ajax; and, rolling along the dust of the plain,  
 he picked up a large jagged rock, and threw it straight  
 at Ajax, who raised his shield to ward off the blow,  
 and the rock made the bronze covering of his shield  
 ring all over with violent reverberation.

So Ajax flung his shield aside, and he lifted up  
 high, with both hands outstretched, a far larger stone;

then with one hand he swung it round and sent it off  
 with immeasurable strength. And it smashed into  
 Hector's shield, and caved it in, as a millstone crushes  
 the husk of the grain; and Hector fell to his knees,  
 surprised by the heavy weight of the stone on him;  
 and he went down onto his back under his collapsed shield.

But Apollo, watching from the oak, swept in and raised Hector  
 to his feet at once.

Now both men eyed each other, breathing evenly  
 in and out, with concentration so fierce that neither  
 saw night falling round them. Each readied to draw sword  
 in close fight, and wound the other : but between them  
 two men rushed in to pause this trial of skill, one  
 from the Trojan lines and one from the Achaean,  
 the ministers Talthylus and Idaeus,  
 both surpassing wise. Raising their staffs before them,  
 their symbol of office and law, they came to stand  
 between the two combatants; and wise Idaeus,  
 Priam's personal attendant, spoke out to all :

"No more fighting, my sons! Clearly you both are loved  
 by Zeus! You warriors have been blessed with power  
 our imagination can scarcely contain, yet  
 all here saw it. But now look yourselves—it is already night,  
 and all men must follow, for the time, what is right."

And Ajax answered :

"Idaeus, allow Hector to decide what is right.

It was he who invited the best of us to step forward  
and fight. He speaks first, and I shall follow his word.”

So Hector answered him :

“Ajax, the gods have indeed given you greatness,  
in stature, in quality, and in degree; your strength  
is wondrous, and your every move precisely right.  
I say you are far the best of the Achaeans.

So let us follow right, and cease this fight for now;  
for it is already night; and we will meet again.

I wish you well, and that you have rest by your ships  
among your people—and especially among  
your friends and fellow warriors.

I will go inside the city. I go to join  
the Trojan men and Trojan women together  
praying to the gods.

But first allow me to gift you a remembrance,  
so that hereafter both Achaean and Trojan  
will say : ‘The two men fought a ferocious battle,  
yet parted as friends.’”

So spoke Hector, and handed to δῖος Ajax  
his sword with carven silver handle, in its sheath,  
and his entire sword-belt, a well-cut piece of leather.  
And Ajax gave Hector his own sword-belt, dyed bright  
crimson. Then each went his way, one to the Achaeans,



the other into the army of the Trojans,  
 who cheered loudly to see their leader still alive  
 and well, walking away from the invincible  
 hands of insurmountable Ajax; so they led  
 Hector into the city as they might a god,  
 for they could scarcely believe he was safe and sound.

On the other side of the battlefield, meanwhile,  
 Ajax strode through the ranks, pleased with his victory;  
 and was brought before the tent of Agamemnon,  
 supreme commander of the Achaean forces.  
 Son of Atreus led Ajax inside, then gave word  
 to begin the night's feast. So the servants slaughtered  
 a robust bull, in sacrifice to Zeus, who sits  
 above the supremacy of men, and decides  
 all outcomes. They flayed the body, then prepared it;  
 and cut it into large pieces, which they skilfully  
 roasted on spits, then drew off and served; and the feast  
 began. And Agamemnon requested Ajax's  
 plate, and himself placed there the portion of honour,  
 the weighty prime rib roast, generously marbled  
 and tender.

Now while each man ate his due serving, Nestor  
 gave counsel to his commander, who always heard  
 his word first, and with favour. So Nestor, sitting  
 beside Agamemnon, leaned close, and spoke, saying :

"Son of Atreus, many of us lie dead out there,  
 fallen by Ἄρης' spear, and their souls now collect  
 down at Hades gate. So, when dawn comes, it were best

not to start any fight, but to gather the dead.

We'll cart them out with oxen and mules, and burn them some way from the camp. As for the ashes, the men can do as they wish. Some may choose to keep them, to bring them back home, whenever that may be. But for all others, let us build a single pyre, then raise up over it a single tomb for all."

So spoke Nestor, who continued :

"Which reminds me," he said. "If we're meant to stay here for a drawn-out time, then we should very quickly raise up a high wall, to defend ourselves and our ships. We must ensure its gates are built precisely, so they can be firmly sealed. And we have another option open to us : we can dig a deep trench beyond the wall, to stop their chariots and foot-forces; or at least slow them down for a time, for the royal, god-faring, gift-giving Trojans are not without ingenuity in the fight."

So spoke Nestor. And Agamemnon, sitting with Ajax to one side, and Nestor on the other, nodded, but said not a word in answer.

The ingenious Trojans, meanwhile, were gathered together in the heart of their walled city, sitting at supper within the doors of the king's palace, luminous as the moon aspiring in the sky; and the words exchanged between royal Priam's sons were stormy and contentious.

And over the din of voices Antenor called  
for silence. He then began to speak, angrily :

“Hear me now!—all good Trojans, all Dardanians  
and all our noble allies—that I may tell you  
what my heart cannot keep silent. The price of Helen’s  
beauty is too steep for us; who would willingly buy  
bitterness and sorrow? Come now! and let us be  
sensible! We will hand Helen to Atreus’ sons  
and they will take her away. Do we not all know  
that we now fight in violation of our oath,  
our solemn promise taken in sight and ear of God.  
Where do you think that wilful error will lead us?  
I say we shall come to no good unless we do as I say.”

Thus spoke Antenor, then sat down. Then Alexandros stood up,  
husband to ethereal Helen. He spoke just as hotly,  
though with such a smooth and even composure, that one  
might think him peaceful.

“Antenor,” he said, “your language grates on my ears;  
surely you have a more agreeable manner  
of expression. But if I understand you right,  
I would think the gods have taken more than your speech  
from you; I would think you have lost your mind. One cannot  
do what one cannot do : I will not give up my wife.

You hear me speak as plain as you? I will continue—  
and all of you, please, hear these words : I am willing  
to give over everything else I brought with me

on my ships back from Argos. I also propose  
an addition, contributed from my own personal wealth.”

So spoke Alexandros, then sat down. Then the king  
rose before them, old Priam, and he delivered  
his royal decision, speaking calmly :

“Hear me, Trojans, Dardanians, and our allies.  
Tonight we sit and eat at peace, but, after this,  
stay on your guard all the night through; we know very  
well now that these Achaeans are not artless men.  
One man alone could slip into the city and bring  
terror. So we shall stay alert all the night through.

Meanwhile, Idaeus shall go down to their ships,  
and deliver to Menelaus and Agamemnon  
the word that noble Alexandros has just spoken.  
(He who began this war has no care to end it  
gently.) Idaeus shall also ask of Atreus’  
sons if they wish to cease their belligerence till  
they have removed their dead from the field, and burned them.

Thereafter, we will fight; and God will distinguish  
between us, and grant one of us the victory.”

So spoke Priam, king of the Trojans, and all heard  
and obeyed.

While the Trojan army continued with their evening meal,  
the minister Idaeus left the assembly and Troy’s  
walls, and crossed the bloody Scamander plain under the starlight.

When he came to the army of the Achaeans, he was brought before Agamemnon and the best of his men, assembled beside the king's own prodigious ship. Idaeus then conveyed Priam's message, saying, with everyone listening to him :

"Son of Atreus, and all excellent Achaeans,  
Priam my king, along with his noble Trojans,  
have requested of me to make known to you, if  
you are inclined to hear, the word of Alexandros,  
for whose sake all this contention has come to be.

Alexandros is willing to deliver to you  
all the treasure he took on his ships from Argos,  
when he safely (as the gods willed it) crossed the sea,  
and came back here to Troy; and wishes to enlarge  
this with a portion of his own personal wealth.

But the wedded wife of noble Menelaus :  
Alexandros says he will not give her over,  
though the Trojans favour this alternative.

My king has also requested of me to ask  
if you wish to cease the fight until the bodies  
are taken from the plain and burned. Following that,  
we will fight until God gives victory to one of us."

So spoke minister Idaeus of the Trojans;  
and in response all the Achaeans sat in silence.

After a time, mighty Diomedes spoke :

“We shall receive nothing from Alexandros, not even Helen.  
It is plain, even to one who has lost his mind,  
that all we need to do is tighten the noose we have round Troy.”

Thus spoke Diomedes, and all the Achaeans shouted out  
in applause.

Then Agamemnon remarked to Idaeus :

“Idaeus, you hear the word of the Achaeans :  
that is their answer to Alexandros, and it  
is agreeable to me. As for the dead,  
I have no objection to the Trojans burning  
their bodies to ash. All men living should bring peace  
to the dead quickly, and must not fail, for dead  
souls go under the earth to gods. To this treaty  
let Zeus be our witness. Let us not fail in this.”

Thus spoke Agamemnon, and lifted his sceptre to Zeus.

So minister Idaeus left the assembly,  
and crossed the Scamander plain under the starlight,  
and returned to Priam and the Trojans at their evening meal;  
and Idaeus delivered Agamemnon’s message to Priam.  
Then the Trojans, and the Dardanians, and everybody  
now knew where they stood, that the battle for Troy would continue.

So, before dawn, in the hesitation between light and dark,  
when shining Helios is hazy still under Oceanus' current,  
rising up from the deep toward the mildly rippling surface :  
the two armies met on the plain, and buried their dead.

In the near-dark one man could barely distinguish  
the man next to him, and the remains of many dead  
were likewise obscure, even when splashed with water  
to wash the blood away. As it was, the bodies  
were lifted onto the carts by men shedding hot tears.

Now Priam had sent word that he would not allow  
any sound of lament from his men, to match  
the Achaeans, who were apparently well-schooled  
in silent movement. So in silence the dead were  
piled in a heap and burned indiscriminately.  
Then the Trojans, their hearts seething with grief, returned  
within the city walls.

In like manner, the Argives gathered their dead, and firewood,  
and piled the corpses in a heap, and burned them,  
then returned to their ships.

Thus, on the Scamander plain, for years to come, stood a grave  
for the unmarked Achaean dead, a high-raised mound of stones.

So, when the sun was high over the plain and surrounding fields,  
burning in the broad blue sky, the Achaeans were well-advanced  
on a high wall, raised as protection for themselves and their ships.  
And the gates they built, for their chariots, were perfectly made,  
and fitted together tightly, safely. And hard-by the wall  
they dug a trench, deep and wide, and stuck a palisade of stakes in it.

Thus the Argives busied themselves tirelessly with their tasks.

Then Poseidon Earthshaker bent to the ear of Zeus Father,  
the sky-minded master who moves the stars and lets all things be;  
and while the gods gazed down upon the sparkling Achaean  
army at work, Earthshaker remarked to his mighty brother :

“What is this that these mortals do, assembling such lofty  
projects on the woefully limited ball of earth? With such  
works appearing, will any man ever again feel awe for gods,  
and the immeasurable works that we alone can produce?

Look at these long-haired Achaeans and that wall they’ve raised with speed  
to match the gods—so they might think. Yes, they think they protect  
themselves and their ships with such a lofty wall. I don’t think so,  
however. In fact, I know so. And admire that ditch with stakes  
in it! These men truly think much of themselves; or, if I’m kind,  
let’s say they think they make the best of their capabilities.

Meanwhile, during all of this marvellous work, they fail  
to sacrifice to us. Where is our due and proper hecatomb?  
You see they cease to think of us while raising their own works.

Furthermore, such a grandiosity will be spoken of  
all over that pathetic ball of earth, though it’s just a wall;  
and men will forget *our* wall, the wall that Apollo and I  
built around Troy for the hero Laomedon. It was the wall  
that allowed for everything inside to arise, for Troy to be  
as it is! It makes me shake to see the Achaeans attempt  
to outdo us.”



And Zeus answered :

“ὦ πόποι ! My brother, whom all everywhere know as ‘Earthshaker’,  
 worries himself with a wall? Perhaps some solitary spirit  
 somewhere might concern itself with a wall, say, a water nymph  
 without power to build to such a height, though the will be strong.  
 And Earthshaker, known everywhere, is worried about his fame?  
 Your name is as the Dawn spreads, wholly over the earth. So enough  
 of this. When those ‘long-haired Achaeans’ go back to their homeland,  
 simply send the salt sea up and demolish it. Their effort  
 will be buried in obscurity, and lost, and forgotten,  
 and your wall will be celebrated to your satisfaction.”

In just this way the two gods spoke on Olympus.

Beneath them, Helios burned, and men went to and fro. Later,  
 when both armies sat at supper, Priam and Agamemnon  
 both heard a rumbling sound from afar, Zeus’ thunder. So  
 each man held out his cup, and each man poured out some drops of wine,  
 contemplating the powerful son of Cronos. Then, thinking  
 of tomorrow’s work, all went to their rest, and received the gift  
 of god-given sleep.

End of Bk VII

## Book VIII

Zeus, then, Long-Watcher, looked down through starlight at the Trojan  
and Achaean armies occupying the Scamander plain,  
one in their walled city, the other at their ships by the sea.  
Contemplating from Olympus, he spoke to the gods at his side :

“Hear me,” he said, “particularly you lionesses among us,  
that I may tell you my word. From this time, no goddess, nor god,  
shall cut through my intentions, and attempt to unknot my plan.  
Let Destiny come to be as it is, without your effort.

So any god or goddess I see aiding one side or the other  
will feel the sharp push of my lightning bolt, knocking him, or her,  
down to the abyss of Tartarus, there to hang in darkness  
without depth, as far from our sight as tip to toe, Olympus  
to Tartarus. You shall dangle, ankle-tight, from a bronze cord.  
There you’ll have time to contemplate the power of your father.

I do not invite you to try me. Do not seek to confirm  
my words. A cord of well-twisted bronze hanging from the black air :  
you’ll think, by tugging on it, you’ll loosen its suspension.  
Do not try me, or you will learn the power of your father.

Especially when I snip it myself and you end up washed up  
at my feet from the sea, salty with Poseidon’s brine,  
and sodden with sorrow for your woeful misunderstanding.”

Thus spoke Zeus, and received no answer from the gods around him,  
who marvelled at his uncompromising words. But, finally,  
the bright-eyed goddess Athena spoke out, and said :

“O Father, son of Cronos, supremest master, who rules Time  
and all in it, we know well of the power of the highest,  
and we respect it.

That said, I pity the Danaans, and would not have them lost  
at the end. That is how it is with me. However, I, for one,  
will keep back from the bloody part of war, as you ask of us.

But may I benefit the Danaans with recommendations?  
My friendship will be a welcome balance to your hate; and my  
counsel might save them from your unjustifiable bias,  
which may bring them a heated lightning strike.”

So spoke Athena. Father Zeus smiled at that, and answered her :

“Be happy, sweet daughter. In truth I am not interested  
in any of this. You know I’m always generous with you.”

So spoke Zeus; and his daughter smiled back.

Zeus then left the convocation of gods. To leave Olympus,  
the All-Powerful required no golden chariot pulled  
by horses of galloping bronze hoofs, trappings that lesser gods  
might require for transit; for Zeus was already everywhere,  
and adjusting his concentration took him first here, or there.  
Just now, atop Gargarus, Ida’s highest peak, incense flared,  
its end seething red by the altar standing in his sacred  
grove of oak. The priests had retired for rest; here, thus, Zeus sat  
in fragrant solitude, in blessed silence under the stars.  
O Zeus, never was there a god who felt himself so alone.

He glanced at the Trojans' mazy city, and the Achaeans  
by their ships, as Dawn spread herself over the Scamander plain.

Down below, the steadfast Achaeans ate their early meal in haste  
down by their huts, preparing for another day of battle.

Then without a pause they went from their breakfast to their armour,  
fitting their gleaming breastplates, and sharpening their spears and swords;  
and very quickly were ready for combat. Likewise the Trojans,  
across the way, prepared themselves for war. Throughout the city  
the warriors knew their numbers were far fewer now, yet still  
they were eager to meet the enemy up close, for they had  
no choice—they must protect the women and children of Troy.

So all the gates of the city swung open, and the Trojan  
army moved onto the plain, both foot-forces and chariots :  
and the noise they raised was deafening.

And both armies met at a spot on the plain and batted their  
shields each upon each; and spears crossed the air back and forth; and sharp  
sword-edges scuffed and scraped together; and the noise intensified  
to an intolerable volume, yet it motivated  
all warriors to force yet louder sound. Cries of grief and shouts  
of triumph mixed in the tumult, and the soil ran with blood.

For as long as the morning grew brighter and hotter, so long  
did the long spears and stones fly to and fro, and warriors kept  
falling. Death-bringing weapons kept hitting their mark. At high noon,  
when Helios burned at his height, evenly lighting up the air,  
Zeus raised, for all gods to see it, the very weighing scales  
themselves : and there would be one golden plate for the Trojans, and  
one golden plate for the Achaeans. On both he placed black fate.

And all gods that lived in earth and sky saw the Achaean plate  
 lower on its chains until the imbalance was complete : down  
 to a day of destiny had the Achaeans fallen, a fate  
 they wouldn't anticipate—to keep the Achaeans keen, as  
 it would ultimately turn out. So Zeus thundered from Ida's  
 highest peak, and for a quick flash his lightning burned on the plain  
 hotter than the sun, and the Achaean army saw, and feared.

At noon the Trojan warriors overpowered the Achaeans,  
 repulsing them with brutal punishment, and pushed them backwards  
 toward their ships, away from the city. Their resistance surprised  
 Idomeneus; and Agamemnon; and the Ajaxes,  
 both the lesser and the greater fighter; for all of these men  
 were experienced in the ways of Ἄρης , god of destruction;  
 yet not one stood his ground, but he fell back, and kept doing so.  
 Nestor alone held position and fought the overwhelming  
 Trojan onslaught, as a standard for all Achaeans to follow;  
 in truth he stood firm because his chariot was disabled.  
 Old man Nestor had brought with him a third horse, bound with two ropes  
 to the crossbar, where his two other horses were yoked beside it.  
 It was this horse that was struck by an arrow sent by Paris,  
 husband to lovely-haired Helen : so the pain-bringing arrow  
 flew through the horse's head where his flowing mane's first hairs grew out,  
 and entered his brain, a fatal place. So the horse leapt up here  
 and there in pain, and shook about with the arrow fixed in his head,  
 and his companion horses and chariot were thrown into confusion  
 as he lurched and staggered by the bronze yoke. And as the old man  
 drew his sword and hacked at the bucking horse's two ropes, Hector  
 came galloping in swiftly, confidently, two spears in hand,  
 the chariot of Hector himself. And death would have taken  
 the old man away then and there, had not Diomedes seen,

just as the warrior was shouting loudly to Odysseus :

“Zeus-born! Why have you turned round with the rest, with shields on their backs?  
Away with you! And take care of yourself, so that an arrow  
doesn’t prick a shoulder!”

So shouted Diomedes, who then continued :

“No! Odysseus! Come back! This goddamn Hector’s on Nestor!  
Help me fight him back!”

So he shouted, but Odysseus heard none of it in the  
fighting, as he kept stepping back toward the ships as the Trojans  
came on. So Diomedes turned away, and saw himself alone  
among the foremost fighters, as all his fellow warriors  
were behind him. So he fought his way to Nestor’s agitated  
chariot, and he shouted out again, this time to the old man :

“Come with me!” he said. “Your chariot is upset! Your horses  
are slow anyway. Come onto my chariot and see what  
Trojan horses can do. These two were Aeneas’. You can  
tell me if you’ve ever seen faster horses. Come on here and  
we’ll face Hector together. Worry about your horses later.”

So Diomedes spoke, as he hefted Nestor beside him.

Then he said to the old man :

“Take the reins and I’ll send Hector a keepsake : two Achaean spears.”

This he said, while Nestor’s attendants jumped onto the old man’s

chariot, Sthenelus and mighty Eurymedon. They cut loose the chaotic, stricken trace-horse; then rode off.

Nestor, meanwhile, took the reins from Diomedes, and cracked the whip over the horses; so they shot forward towards Hector, who charged fearlessly head-on into their range, δῖος Hector, moving quick as lightning. Diomedes let fly, yet missed him, but his spear stuck straight through the chest of the driver beside him, Eniopeus, Thebaeus's son, a young man of good humour : the reins fell from his hands as he fell out of the chariot, and Nestor's horses swerved round his body and kept on towards Hector, and Eniopeus, sprawled on the earth, gave up his strength, and his life. And Hector, as he took his fast-galloping horses in hand, felt anguish cloud over him at the loss of his friend, and he veered off and away, but not to return to the body; he required a daring charioteer, and found one quickly : fearless Archeptolemus, son of Iphitus, precisely the man Hector wanted. So Hector shouted for the driver, who jumped onto the chariot; and Hector gave him the reins.

Then a terrible thought blazed through the entire Achaean army : they were penned up like sheep beside the city of Troy, and ruin was at hand, and they were helpless to stop it coming : there were no movements available to evade the irreparable death coming for them.

It was then that the Father of God and Men thundered again, and let fly a dazzling electric bolt of many-forked lightning : and its coruscating point cracked the earth before the horses of Diomedes. The two horses came to a sliding stop, and in terror turned toward their chariot and cowered there.

And all the warriors smelled the fiery sulphur in the air.

Nestor let the reins slip from his hands, his body stiff with fear;  
and he spoke to Diomedes, saying :

“Diomedes, everybody got the message, I think. Today  
is not to be our day of victory. In fact, we must retreat.  
Is not that the meaning of the light that came only from Zeus?  
Our supremacy will come another time. Fighting on, now,  
would be senseless for us. We cannot overcome the will of Zeus.”

And Diomedes answered :

“No doubt you speak right, most worthy sir, we all indeed saw that.  
Yet to think of retreat leaves me conflicted. Zeus has spoken,  
I accept that, yet I already hear Hector himself speaking,  
saying in assemblies, ‘Tydeus’ son! Put to flight  
to his ships!’ He will declare this loudly. I’d rather be dead.”

And in answer to this Nestor said :

“ ὦ μοι ! These are the words of Tydeus’ son?  
Let Hector declare, loud enough for Olympus  
to shake, that Diomedes is a womanly  
coward, and weak! No Trojan, Dardanian,  
nor anyone will hear such rubbish with belief!  
Especially the wives of all the powerful  
husbands you’ve slaughtered, and left worthless in the dust.”

So spoke Nestor, who turned their horses round to flee



back to the ships through the chaotic Achaean  
 retreat. And the oncoming Trojan army let  
 out a great battle-cry, and redoubled the strength  
 of their push, sending a shower of stones and spears  
 at the backs of the withdrawing Achaean men.

And Hector came on strong at them with his new charioteer;  
 and fast on their heels he shouted out for Diomedes to hear :

“What a backside has Tydeus’ son! Where are you running?  
 Back to your throne of honour? Look! The Danaans rush quickly  
 to prepare your supper, and fill your drinking cup! But now they’ll  
 laugh and laugh and sit you with the serving women! Go on, you  
 little girl’s toy, run away! The sight of you sickens my eyes!  
 Go on! Troy’s walls are too high for women to climb! You’re eager  
 to carry our wives away? Before that I shall cut you dead!  
 And you’ll have all of forever to wonder over your weakness!”

So shouted mighty Hector, and the son of Tydeus groaned;  
 and he fought the half of his mind that bid him turn his horses  
 round and fight the bastard head-on. Three times he almost turned about,  
 and each time Zeus from Ida thundered, stinging Diomedes’  
 heart. And the Trojans heard the thunder as a rallying cry,  
 and δῖος Hector shouted again, this time to his own men :

“Onward, Trojans! Keep after them, friends! Fight with frenzy, and think  
 only of victory! Zeus promises us triumph and glory—  
 and for our enemy, death! Look! They rush to cower behind  
 their silly wall, their grand build beneath our regard! But they can’t  
 keep us back! We’re too strong, and our horses will easily leap  
 their worthless ditch! When my fury breaks through their wall, you will see

a fire to rival the lightning, when all their ships go up  
in flames—from my own hand! And in the smoke of the destruction  
one by one I will cut them down beside the confining sea!”

So he said, then shouted to his horses, saying :

“Xanthus! And you, good Lampus! Repay me now for all the care  
beautiful Andromache shows you! For all the honey-sweet wheat  
and the water, all for you to eat and drink to cheer your hearts!  
All that she gives you even before she serves her dear husband!”

So he shouted out, then spoke quieter, to himself, saying :

*“Come on! Faster, my friends! We must pluck Nestor’s shield off his old  
bones! His famous shield all of solid gold—even the goddamn  
handles! And before I’m done I’ll strip Diomedes of that  
elaborate breast-plate of his, known as Hephaestus’ hand-work.  
Kill both of these men, and the Achaeans this very night will  
beg to get the hell out of here.”*

So raging Hector prayed solemnly to himself; and Queen Hera,  
hearing this, and watching her beloved Achaeans retreating  
from combat, stirred on her lofty throne, and all Olympus shook  
with her upset; and she turned to mighty Poseidon, and spoke :

“ ὦ πόποι ! Earthshaker, whom the whole world of men admires!  
Can you not find in your heart even a particle of pity  
for the Danaans, who are being crushed? We know it’s Zeus’  
meddling that’s causing this silly repulse to happen to them.  
My brother, if you have no care to show *me* any sympathy,  
may you not think of *them* at least, and all their kindness to you,

and all those superb offerings they lower to your altars  
 in Helice and Aegae, the cities of earth devoted,  
 to a man, in worshipping your name? Also, I recall you  
 once saying you preferred an Achaean victory. So then  
 let us have an Achaean victory! All gods here who wish  
 the Achaeans well, and the Trojans to die, let us react  
 with the power that befits us, and force those horrible Trojans  
 back! In doing this we'll irritate our 'all-powerful' Zeus,  
 whose voice travels so far that nothing can escape it in peace.  
 Let him watch *us* work. Perhaps our success will keep him silent  
 while he sits off on his own, high on Ida, occupied  
 with what he calls his 'loneliness'."

And in answer to this, Earthshaker Poseidon sat troubled,  
 and said :

"Hera, I hear you hurling words about, but I'm trying not  
 to hear them. You would prefer us to face off against mighty  
 Zeus, Cronos' son? If *you* recall, he's the most powerful  
 god of all. So I for one will stay out of this bit, and watch  
 the war as a moment's entertainment."

Thus, in this way, they spoke one to another; and Queen Hera  
 turned elaborately away from her brother with a frown.

Just now, down below, in the heat of their retreat,  
 the Achaeans had muddled themselves into con-  
 fusion, having bottlenecked the massive numbers  
 of their army by the turbulent waves of the sea.  
 Many men had made it past the Wall to their ships,  
 where they were organising and rearming themselves :

but just as many still remained on the other side,  
 caught between Wall and trench, unable to struggle  
 past their own defences and make it through the gates  
 to safety. So innumerable warriors and chariots  
 and horses, cut off from escape for the moment,  
 were crammed together in a crush to stop the breath,  
 stuck in place with nowhere to move, but only to look  
 round in panic, and wait for the congestion to ease :

And Hector, coming on with fury, eldest son of Priam  
 of Troy, laughed to see these so-called 'sons of Ἄρης' crowded thick  
 with turmoil and panic, their raised spears clashing together  
 like branches in a wild wind : so had Zeus meant this rout to be.

διός Hector, with his fierce forces behind him, was hell-bent on  
 watching the Argives go down in flames, eager to set ablaze  
 all their ships and take away their one way of escape from Troy :  
 all he needed was to get closer.

But Queen Hera was still watching. So she placed in Agamemnon's  
 mind a will to rouse his warriors. The supreme commander,  
 then, tore his sea-purple cloak from his shoulders and waved it round,  
 calling all his leaders to an impromptu assembly.

These mighty warriors gathered by Odysseus' ship,  
 his huge, black, wide-bellied sea-going vessel, with figurehead  
 in shape of a terrible sea-monster, to strike fear in those  
 who saw it. His ship stood in the centre of the arrangement  
 of ships, with Ajax's at one end of the line, and Achilles'  
 at the other, both equally far off; for both warriors  
 from the start had trusted in the power of their hands and had

no thought of quick escape.

So Agamemnon, king of men, shouted at his warriors  
with heated words :

“Shame on you, you despicable cowards! Everyone will say,  
‘How strong those Argives looked, but how weak inside!’ We won’t hear it,  
though, because we’ll all be dead! Where have all your grandiose boasts  
gone? All those proclamations of ‘we’re the best’, ‘we’re the strongest’,  
all that big talk in assembly back at Lemnos, when you  
stuffed your faces with high-horned cattle and drank your overflowing  
bowls of wine, pronouncing ridiculously that each of us  
will take down one hundred, no, two hundred Trojans with our swords!  
How eager you were then to stand up to the enemy and weigh  
yourself one against another! And now you can’t even kill  
one man, this Hector—who I’m sure is coming to burn our ships  
to ash. Then where will we be? Other than sweating by a blaze  
of ruin all the way down the line!

Zeus Father! Have you ever torn down a mighty king so low?  
Have you ever stolen such sure victory out of his hands?

Warriors! Do I speak blindly, in bewilderment? Or do  
I sound as strong as ever? Now what will you do about it?

Mighty Zeus! Did I pass even a single altar to your  
greatness when my rowers brought me to this disastrous place?  
Over and over I made sacrifice to you, honouring  
your power with all the best pieces, with the savoury scent  
of fat and the thigh-bones of bulls, praying to bring down the walls  
of Troy. Zeus! I beg you to bring my plan to completion! At least

let us get out of here alive! Do not allow the Trojans  
to destroy the Achaeans!"

Thus spoke Agamemnon, so enraged with weakness  
that fiery tears stung the vessels of his eyes.

And Zeus Father, having allowed himself to hear this harangue,  
nodded in sympathy, his sure sign that the prized Achaeans  
would be saved, and remain in light, and not be lost, for Hades  
to have and hold in oblivion for time immeasurable.

So Zeus Supreme, punisher and saviour both, from Ida's peak  
dispatched an eagle to soar over the dusty air above  
the field of battle, the clearest omen of all winged things.  
And Agamemnon said not a word, nor did any of his  
shamefaced leaders, while astonished they watched the eagle fly  
on high with a fawn dangling loose and helpless in its claws.  
This fawn was the swiftest of all the young of a mighty deer.  
In speechless awe the Argives saw the eagle let its quarry  
loose, and the young thing fell from the sky, a long and extensive  
drop through the air down to smash against a beautiful altar,  
the very one where the Argives often offered sacrifice  
to Zeus, the incomparable author of divination.

And so it was that the Achaean warriors knew that Zeus  
Father had sent this sign to them. So, without one more spoken  
word, the leaders of men looked one to another, then gathered  
their weapons into their fists, and went forth to fight the Trojans.

First among them was Tydeus' son Diomedes, who  
drove his galloping horses towards the gates of their defences;

and the press of Achaean warriors bunched there opened a lane  
 for him to pass by, then cheered loudly enough to fill the sky.  
 And before the eyes of all he worked the reins, and his horses  
 brought his chariot up into the air, and leapt over the trench;  
 and on he rode into the Trojan lines to face off man to man :  
 and swift as an omen fell Agelaus into the dust, son  
 of Phradraon and a great Trojan warrior : but now he  
 was dead : so the mistake he'd made would be his last. When he saw  
 Diomedes coming, he'd wheeled his horses round to flee the  
 terrifying fighter, whose face just then was as a Gorgon's :  
 and for all his bright idea he got a sharp spear fixed between  
 his shoulder-blades, and out it burst in a bloody mess through his  
 chest : so Agelaus tumbled from his chariot, and his armour  
 clattered against the careless earth.

This was the death that got the Argives moving with dominance.

And fast behind Diomedes came the sons of Atreus,  
 Agamemnon and Menelaus : and fast after them the  
 Aiantes, radiating fury : and after them Idomeneus :  
 and then Meriones, famous killer of men and just now  
 blood-thirsty : then Eurypylus came forward, Euaemon's son :  
 and Odysseus slipped from one bit of cover to the next  
 so no one saw him coming : thus the ninth man to advance in  
 plain sight was Teucer, the man-killer brilliant with the bow.

Teucer lowered to one knee behind the huge shield held there by  
 Ajax. So Ajax would hoist his shield aside, and Teucer would  
 raise his curved bow. His quick eyes would spy his victim, and he'd shoot  
 off his arrow, bringing death to the man, who would fall where he stood  
 and surrender his life to Hades : thus would the Trojans yield

up another man. Then Teucer would draw back, as a child nestles by his mother, and Ajax's mighty arm would bring down the resplendent shield before the assassin, covering him in safety once more.

Which of the Trojans did Teucer icily pick off, one by one? Orsilochus first, and Ormenus, and Ophelestes, and Daetor, and Chromius, and the godlike Lycophontes, and Amopaon, Polyamon's son, and Melanippus : all fell one after another in quick succession onto the silent earth. And Agamemnon relished the sight of his assassin dismantling the Trojan battle-lines, as arrow flew off upon arrow; so he came up to his man, and Ajax brought the huge, heavy shield down before them; and the king said :

"Teucer! My very man! Entirely Telamon's son! With every arrow driven home you bring your fellow men closer to victory! And a win for your father Telamon, though he be far off in island Salamis : you bring him glory. Let us win the battle first, then I'll put some gold in your hand, or horses if you like—and a golden chariot with them—or I'll give you a woman."

And assassin Teucer answered :

"Most honoured sir, currently I need no encouragement. However, the thought of a woman in my bed urges me to wrap this up faster, and give mighty Ajax's arm a rest. Honoured Ajax knows I haven't stopped shooting since you pushed us forward. While we pressure the enemy and force them



backwards to their city, I sit here on my knee  
 nice and relaxed, and pick them off one by one.  
 I scout the lines and at my leisure I choose.  
 These arrows I've had made for me at my design :  
 have you ever seen such length and cut in barbs? As  
 far as they fly, they go in just as far—I don't  
 shoot to wound; bringing maximum bleeding cheers me.  
 Eight arrows now so far are stuck in eight dead Trojans.  
 If the years I've taken from them could add to mine  
 I'd live to two hundred. But sir, I used to say  
 there was no one alive I couldn't hit, but this bastard  
 Hector is a mad dog."

So he said as he set another arrow on his bow-string.  
 He let fly straight at Hector, coolly resolute to kill him.  
 But he missed : and could hardly believe it : but still his arrow  
 found a target : it tore into the chest of Gorgythion,  
 one of King Priam's noble and excellent sons, who now felt  
 a well-barbed arrow fix in his exploded heart. His mother  
 was gorgeous Castianeira, shapely as the goddesses,  
 a daughter of a woman from Aesyme. Now the man's head sank  
 to one side as a poppy leans from the dews and rains of spring  
 in a rank garden : even so his head wearied under the weight  
 of his helmet.

So Teucer set another arrow coolly on his bow-string,  
 eager to kill Hector : and let fly straight at him : but he missed,  
 for Apollo, far-reaching meddler, poked the flight sideways.  
 But the arrow hit fearless Archeptolemus, Hector's  
 charioteer. As he drove his horses, the arrow stuck him  
 in the chest. So he fell from the chariot-board, and his fast-

galloping horses ran looser and left their driver behind  
 to die. Hector grit his teeth in angry sorrow as he took  
 the reins himself; and even as he mourned his charioteer  
 he sought a new one, and shouted to his half-brother  
 Cebriones to come aboard and take the reins and drive  
 the horses. And Cebriones leapt onto the chariot.

But Hector himself sprang past him, shouting a terrifying  
 sound as he jumped to the dirt, where he reached  
 for a stone and flung it at Teucer straight as an arrow,  
 furious to kill him. And even as Teucer had Hector  
 dead in his sight, and his arrow ready on the string, before  
 he could pull back to maximum stretch, the rock smashed his shoulder  
 at the collar-bone, at the knob by his neck, often a fatal  
 place for a wound. Just there had Hector aimed for, and the jagged  
 stone snapped the bow-string. So that was that for the bow,  
 and Teucer dropped it; and himself went loose, and sank  
 to the earth onto his knees, and lay there. Ajax,  
 meanwhile, leapt in front of Teucer and brought his heavy  
 shield down as cover. Then two good soldiers came running in,  
 Mecisteus, son of Echius, and high-spirited Alastor,  
 and carried Teucer, gnashing his teeth in pain, back to the ships.

But the Danaans' repulse would be a short one,  
 for the Olympian high on Ida's icy peak  
 peered down upon the clamorous plain, and aroused  
 new fury in the Trojan warriors, for no  
 further reason that Homer explicates : except  
 to suggest that life is relentless in making  
 its harrowing point. So the Trojans shoved back to  
 the trench the shambles of the confused Achaeans,

whose motivated onset was cut short, to their  
own great surprise. And δῖος Hector led the charge.

Just as a dog pursuing a lion  
or wild swine attaches its sharp teeth  
in the backside of the beast that turned round  
to run, so Hector advanced on the long-haired  
Achaeans, relentlessly cutting down, one after  
another, all those muddled together at the hindmost;  
and panic broke through any remnant of Achaean order.  
They fled. Some men fell into the deep trench and fixed  
themselves on the pointed stakes, and down slipped their trans-  
fixed bodies to the earth, and when they met the dirt  
they were dead. Others who'd made it through the deadly  
stakes and trench were cut down before they reached the Wall.  
So many Achaean warriors were killed by Trojan hands.

Now, back again by their ships, the Achaean leaders,  
and all their men, raised their hands up to Zeus and prayed.

And furious Hector kept turning about all ways, his eyes  
narrowed as his horses beat the soil with their hooves. His eyes  
outdid Diomedes in ferocity : it were Hector's eyes  
which blazed with the terror of the Gorgonian stare, his eyes  
which fully possessed the fury of man-destroying Ἄρης .

Now, at the sight of those eyes, Queen Hera shifted in her seat  
again, and looked down upon her beloved Achaeans  
with pity. Then, Hera turned to Athena and spoke, saying :

“ ὦ πόποι ! Others are adamant to leave us out of it.

(You follow me, daughter of Zeus Orderer.) So shall  
 we care no more for this war? and not watch any more  
 Danaans die? We shall think of them no longer! Will this be  
 the last time? Look at the overproportion of blood on our side!  
 Now our Danaans shall fall in monotonous death, so many  
 falling to a horrible doom because of one man! Hector!  
 Priam's son. I have no care to tolerate this rage of his;  
 he schools us in evil. Look at all that unbearable work!"

Then spoke the goddess Athena Bright-Eyes :

"This expensive rage of his is indeed overmuch.  
 I would have him destroyed by Achaean hand  
 beside his own walls in his homeland, but my father  
 the Orderer rages indecently, yet unfortunately  
 unwearyingly, and cruelly; and is relentlessly tricky  
 in his ways to defeat my plans. I would call this  
 ungrateful. Does he not remember how many  
 times I kept his son alive, and brought him exhausted  
 through the labours of Eurytheus? Throughout his  
 work he would pray to keep his mind, so Zeus made me  
 go down to secure his feet upright. If I had  
 spent a moment to foresee this day, his son down  
 in Hades, with his hands holding that hated-headed  
 dog, would not have come safely step by step over  
 the black River Styx. His head would have gone under."

And Hera replied :

"Soon enough Father will call you his Shining-Eyed One again."

And Athena continued :

“Shining, indeed—have our horses prepared for us.  
I shall go down into the house of Zeus Orderer  
and put on the armour of combat, and lift the weapons,  
and you and I will go see how glad Hector is to meet us  
between the lines of battle on the field. I say  
Hector of the glinting helmet will be one more  
Trojan satisfying the dogs and birds with his  
fat and flesh, when he lay dead by the Argive ships.”

Thus spoke goddess Athena, breathing fury. Then the queen of heaven  
bade the single-toed horses brought before her, their golden headgear  
magnifying their intense beauty; and she moved to and fro  
beside them, harnessing them, even the delicate-armed queen  
herself, goddess who watches over girls, brides, flowers, and all  
women : Hera now readied the horses to gallop into war.

And Athena Defender let her robe slip from her body  
down to her father’s floor, and stepped out of its soft fabric,  
leaving behind its astonishing embroidery from her  
own hand. She put on instead Zeus Father’s powerful armour,  
and readied for awful war. Then she rose onto her chariot  
and took the spear into her hand, ready to obliterate  
whole armies of men who irritate her, the daughter of a  
mighty father.

Then Hera snapped the whip over the horses, and eagerly  
they sprang like a crack of lightning onward : and in front of her  
the gates of heaven, the passageway of dense, thick cloud, parted,  
releasing a deep, prolonged rumbling thunder as they moved

aside to let them through.

So the horses galloped through the corridor of cloud,  
spurred by the spark of the whip on their backs.

But Zeus Father saw them from Ida's tip, and grew angry :  
a terrible anger. So he summoned Iris to go down  
on golden wings to deliver a message. He said to her :

"Go quickly now, Iris, and turn them round.  
And forbid them my presence. As you go,  
I will tell you the substance of my Word."

So spoke Zeus; and Iris sprung forward, her feet  
sinking step by step along the tops of billowy storm-clouds  
as she moved along. And as she left behind the high mountains  
of Ida she heard Zeus' Word in her mind :

"Remember, charming Iris," he said, "I don't want to see them.  
They want war and I'd rather not humour them. So I will give  
them a choice, and deliver to them the outcome in advance :

I will lame their horses and shatter their chariot. The two  
goddesses shall fall through a darkness for ten years of sunrises :  
their wounds from my one lightning-bolt shall take that long to heal.  
Thus my Shining-Eyes will know what it is to fight her father.  
Hera, however, I have no strong feeling for, no anger.  
I am habituated to her continual contradiction."

Thus Zeus delivered his Word to Iris, who now stood before  
the open gates of heaven, and saw the two goddesses come;

and she stopped them, and delivered her message. First, Iris said :

“Where are you going? Are you two mad? Zeus does not allow you to defend the Argives. He tells you to stay away, or else. Hear now what he has ordained as punishment for defiance.”

So Iris told them Zeus’ Word, then added :

“Zeus had one more word to say,” said Iris, “to most worthy queen Hera. He said, and I quote, ‘you horrid bitch, you think you’re strong enough to raise your hand against the mightiest god there is?’”

This Iris said to the queen, then on wind-fast feet fled the scene.

Then Hera turned to Athena and spoke, saying :

“Oh, Athena dearest! That preposterous father of yours!  
So wrong-headed! So perverse! So misguided! So—corrupted!  
Athena dear, I have decided that we shall no longer  
fight others’ battles. Let those little people mingle like beasts  
down below. So one lives, so one dies; let it be as it is.  
Let *him* concern himself with Trojans and Argives, and pronounce  
as many *Words* as he likes! Whatever is right—whatever  
King God decides what is right (if that’s how he pleasures himself).”

Thus spoke Hera. So she turned the single-toed horses around  
and returned to Olympus. There, the Horai, the goddesses  
of air who direct the gates of heaven, unyoked the horses  
for them, the ornamented horses of unearthly beauty,  
and secured them in their ambrosial stalls, where they enjoyed there  
sweet rest. The Horai then leaned the chariot against a wall

of the blindingly-bright vestibule of Heaven. Meanwhile, the two goddesses returned to the assembly high up on Olympus, and sat down on their thrones, each to one side of Zeus Father's throne; and each sat there burning with anger inside.

Zeus Father himself rose up from the summit of Ida Mount, on chariot wheels he let turn leisurely as he made his way up to the assembly of the gods on high Olympus. When he returned, his massive chariot was settled away by Poseidon Earthshaker, who, at the last, flung a spotless linen cloth over it. And All-Seeing Zeus sat on his throne. Huge Olympus quaked when his feet struck the floor.

So everyone

sat there silently. Neither Athena nor Hera addressed Zeus' Word. But Zeus knew, and he smiled inside, and spoke out :

"Athena, Hera, why these long faces? Surely you have no more interest in the affairs of men. Obliterating Trojans in battle becomes tedious, no? Men win their glory there, not gods. Now let's be serious. In all ways I'm invincible. All the gods in Olympus together cannot turn me. Both of you were quivering with fear before you even stood in battle, and done its terrible work. It shall be as I have foreseen it. Thus I tell you : your chariots would never have brought you back home to Olympus."

So he spoke, and Athena and Hera muttered, contriving new evils for the Trojans. Yet to her father Athena said not a word, but kept her anger inside. His wife Hera, however, could not hold back, and spoke out, saying :



“Must a wife hear such shocking words from her husband?

We all know what you are : the god not easily exhausted.

As it is, we pity the Achaeans warriors. Unlike us,  
they have an end, and too many just now are being destroyed.  
So, we will spare ourselves the dust of battle, just as you wish;  
but we will place encouragement in the minds of our friends,  
so that they may not all die because of your beastly hate.”

And to this from Hera, Zeus Cloud-Gatherer replied :

“You’ll have to ‘spare’ yourself that dust tomorrow, my ox-eyed queen,  
when your ‘beastly’ husband punishes the Argives with the death  
of many fine warriors. Watch, if you care to see my art  
at work. Accept that Hector shall not cease from heavy killing  
till Achilles is persuaded to rise from his spot by his ship,  
to bring help to your precious Achaeans. First, however, all-  
governing Destiny has to show its bright idea to rouse  
Achilles. Till that happens, the Trojans shall push the fighting  
right to the ships themselves, and the Achaeans shall struggle hard  
to fight and survive in that narrow space. Know, my honoured queen,  
you have yet to see the worst, if you care to see, and to ‘place  
encouragement in the minds of our friends’. This is as it is  
decreed of heaven. And I am Heaven. I am Destiny.

As for you, queen, I care not for your anger. I will watch you  
drop to the lowest limits of bottomless Tartarus  
under Hades. There you may dangle with Iapetus  
and Cronos, and never again see the light of Helios,  
never again feel even the slightest breath of air on you,  
but only the darkness of horrible Tartarus—and I

won't lift a finger to help you. Or go off and away on  
your own, and wander wherever, to find whatever, to do  
who knows what—and I will not care one particle, you shameless,  
dog-faced simpleton.”

So spoke Zeus, and Hera gave no answer, and thus the gods sat.

Then the bright light of the sun sank back into Oceanus'  
waters, drawing behind it the cloak of dark night covering  
the grain-giving earth. Only reluctantly did the Trojans  
watch the light fail over the bloody plain; but with relief  
the Achaeans saw their three-times-prayed-for darkness come, to save  
them for another day. Thus, the armies split apart for the night.

Hector, then, most illustrious of Trojans, summoned the men  
to assemble beside the rushing river Scamander, away  
from the ships, in a clearing under the stars, where no corpses  
lay conspicuous in the darkness. This night neither army  
collected their dead. The Trojan warriors stepped down to earth  
from their chariots, and gathered to hear the Word of Hector.  
So the army's leader stuck his shining spear-point of gold  
in the dirt, and spoke out to the assembled warriors :

“Hear me, all Trojans, Dardanians, and Allies.  
We'd have brought an ending to the Achaeans  
this very day, I'm sure of it; we'd have killed them  
all and burned their ships, then gone back inside our Troy.  
But darkness has rushed in, to save the Argives from certain death,  
and their ships from flaming down to ash by the surf of the sea.

We shall obey the darkness, and prepare our evening meal.

Unyoke the horses and feed them. Meanwhile, choose men to go  
 into the city to fetch back cattle and sheep, and fresh corn  
 for the horses. Furthermore, have men gather as much firewood  
 as they can carry, so that our fires will burn all night long  
 as a second dawn rising to heaven. In this way we will see  
 the Argives' movements. They may try to get the hell out of here.  
 But they're mistaken if they think they'll board their ships with ease.  
 We will not let them leave here without a struggle. Spear, arrow,  
 stone, dart, footstool, whatever you have to throw at them, throw it,  
 and give them a hurt to think on when they're sitting back at home,  
 a scar they can never erase from their body, so others  
 will see and say, 'Let us not bring war to the Trojan people,  
 tamer of horses, for they bring with them an always-weeping  
 Ἄρης . Now, all men hear closely what I have to say to you.  
 We must have messengers, as vital as those whom Zeus employs,  
 to go bring the message through the city that all boys fit to fight,  
 and even old men gone grey with age, must gather on the Wall  
 that the gods built for us, for we may require reinforcements.  
 And the housekeeper of each home will have a great fire built,  
 so the city is ablaze in our light; and guards all over  
 will keep a constant watch throughout the night, so that no tricky  
 Achaean ambush sneaks into the city unseen while  
 our army rests on the plain. All this I say to you must be,  
 just as I have said. This command is sound for now, but at dawn  
 we shall assemble and speak further. I hope and pray to Zeus,  
 and to all the gods, that they will drive these dogs, driven blindly  
 by the fates, back into the black ships that brought them here.

Now, as for the army, we will keep sharp guard throughout the night,  
 and at dawn the entire army will tighten its armour  
 and wake the Achaeans with always-weeping Ἄρης fighting

with us. That son of Tydeus, the mighty Diomedes,  
may force me back from the ships and against the wall, or maybe  
I shall kill him, and do as he does—strip him of his armour.  
Tomorrow I shall test his excellence. Both shall come to learn  
if he can withstand my oncoming attack. In truth, I think  
he'll be lying dead at our feet in the dust at the front  
of the fight, alongside many dead friends of his, by the time  
the sun rises on the Scamander. I have no sure knowledge  
of the ways of Athena and Apollo; and all my days  
are allotted and fixed, while they are immortal and ageless;  
but there is one thing going for me : I will bring a great hurt  
to the Argives."

So Hector spoke, and cheers raced through the Trojan lines,  
gathering like the lengthening sound of a rushing river.

Each freed his sweaty horses from the yoke, then bound  
them with a leather cord to each chariot. From  
the city came the men leading the cattle and sheep,  
quickly completing their task; and the wine that sweets  
the mind came just as quickly, with the bread; and much  
firewood was collected. And the wind carried the savoury  
scent of burnt sacrifice up from the plain to Heaven.

Then the men had all night long to think on the order of things,  
on the lines of fight, while their many fires burned.

As when the air is dead calm, and all the stars are glittering  
overhead, with the round moon brightest of all, and the spirit  
of the herdsman who sees this is happy : just so, many fires  
burned in the landscape between River Scamander and the ships

by the sea. Fifty men rested in the blaze of each fire.  
And all the horses fed on white barley and other nibbles,  
while they stood beside the chariots, awaiting the Dawn.

End of Book VIII

## Book IX

Throughout the night, the Trojans kept watch for any enemy movement; but the Achaeans didn't move. Instead, they sat frozen in icy terror, while they contemplated the power of things—both the unexpected strength of the Trojan army, and the unpredictable gods above, whose ways are incalculable, no matter how much thought, prayer, or sacrifice are devoted to them. No Argive would have admitted it aloud, but more than a few warriors of the vast army had to repress a growing panic that night. Meanwhile, their leaders suffered a barely endurable grief for all the fallen heroes of their cause. Just as when two rushing winds assail the seawater from counter directions, and the salty surface curls up with many rising crests, as at Thrace, where the North and West Winds contend offshore, and the swelling water darkens, and hies out into the deep, gathering as it goes a mess of seaweed and sea-wrack : even so, the divided hearts of the Argives weighed ever-heavier with conflict : the desire to win boiled inside, but so did their lamentations for the fallen : so awkwardly they collected many uncomfortable thoughts.

Commander of the army Agamemnon, his heart stricken in this very way, walked to and fro beside the tents of his men, who lay inside them in unquiet rest. Finally, the son of Atreus summoned his ministers, and ordered them to rouse the leaders, but not loudly enough to disturb the others, or to give sign to the enemy. And Agamemnon himself, face wet with tears, worked alongside them, gathering his best men and requesting of them to assemble for a council. And when all sat together at the place of assembly,

under the glimmering stars in the dead middle of the night,  
 and Agamemnon stood to address his distinguished warriors,  
 he saw in their faces what he felt in his heart, and a tear  
 came, even as a trickle of dark water slips slowly down  
 a sheer cliff-face, its trail enduring in the rock. So he  
 stood before them, their commander, with tears on his face, and sighs,  
 heavy-sounding, dropping from him; and finally he spoke out :

“Friends, leaders, rulers of the Argives, and all our counsellors,  
 it seems Highest Zeus, too superior to be predicted,  
 has led us blindly into subjection, and only now do  
 we see that our hands are tied. Too cruel, this. He who is highest  
 is cruellest. I speak no insult to our god, only simple truth.  
 He promised me in all solemnity that Troy’s wall would fall  
 and the city with it, and then we would go home. Now I see,  
 only too late, that Zeus has tricked me. He intends for me  
 to return to Argos an ignominious, inglorious,  
 shameful figure, who lost many worthy warriors. ‘For what?’  
 the people will ask.”

And as Agamemnon spoke, his voice rose louder, and hotter;  
 and many men began coming out of their tents to listen  
 to their leader speak out; and before long, innumerable  
 warriors were standing out in the night air, hearing the words  
 of their commander :

“So this is the truth of our god, High Zeus,” said Agamemnon.  
 “He pleasures in watching the people of an entire city  
 hang their heads down when their home is obliterated, and he  
 will continue to take joy in this in times to come; for his  
 power is greatest, and he can do as he likes. But for us,

Troy stands, seemingly indestructible. So come now! My word is final : we shall board our ships and return to our homeland. For I have no hope of taking Zeus-loving invincible Troy.”

Thus spoke Agamemnon, and in answer, all sat in silence. The silence stretched out for a long, troubled time, as the leaders of the Achaeans sat in vexation and grief, until finally Diomedes spoke out for all to hear his word :

“Son of Atreus, permit me to respond; and hence to call you a fool. I have this right, as is customary in this council. So stifle your anger and hear what I have to say, because I am not done with you. In the first place, do you not recall addressing me, for all to hear, with the following words :

*‘Ah, son of Tydeus the war-wise! Why cower like this, staring from afar into the path to war? Go! Tydeus surely never cowered like this, but was ever in front of his friends, destroying the enemy!’*

With these words, sir, you call me weak and cowardly. Everyone in the army has heard this story by now, all men young and old. But let us turn to you now. Zeus, deceptive as all gods can be—for they can do anything they want and apparently feel no compunction about any of it—has granted us a man to command us who is possessed of a heart of two halves. You have been granted the sceptre, thus receive the honour due above all men; but courage—courage you do not have. Courage is the greatest power of a man, greater than anything held in your hand. Do you actually think the rest of us



are as weak and cowardly as you say we are? If you want to go home, go : there is the way. Draw your ships into the sea, and all those which followed you from Mycenae. The Achaeans still standing here will raze Troy to dust under our feet. All of you 'board your ships and return to your homeland'! Sthenelus and I alone will get to the end. Heaven brought us here to do one thing : win."

At these words the Achaeans cheered for mighty Diomedes. His name they cried out in assent, clapping their hands; wild applause raced along the lines of tents; and Agamemnon, looking this way and that, said not a word in reply. It was he who now stood silenced, uncomfortably so. Saving his leader just now from response was good Nestor, who rose to his feet slowly while the clapping died down; then the old man spoke out for all to hear :

"Son of Tydeus, mighty Diomedes, far beyond us all in courage at the front; and whose counsels of strategy and tactics, which impress our assemblies, are first among all the youths of your own age : These words you spoke to us just now, no Achaean would reject them, nor demand you retract them. Yet, your words are no full account of the matter we now face. You failed to provide anything practical in their place. So we have not come to the end of thought on this point. You are a young man, Diomedes; you might even be my youngest son; yet you have a wisdom, and you express it well. But come now! Let us be sensible. You and Sthenelus alone will not raze the city of Troy to dust. I who am much older in years than yourself shall speak now, and go through each item in turn, till the whole matter is complete in the mind, so we will move sure. No man must ignore my Word, not even king and commander,

mighty Agamemnon. Any man dismayed to cooperate  
in this, is to have no love for his people; and this man begs  
to become friendless, homeless, and punished by Immortal Law.”

So spoke Nestor, experienced in war; then continued his counsel :

“However, resolving our essential objective among  
ourselves in an assembly, requires preparation.  
First, we must obey the night, and order the warriors in  
to their tents, to rest. Next, we must send watchmen out past the Wall  
to join the snipers I posted along our trench, to keep us  
vigilant; let the youngest men here fulfil this particular  
assignment. Meanwhile, son of Atreus, commander of men,  
now it is for you to prepare the way. The right thing to do  
is to order a feast, where the elders shall sit side by side  
and speak. Bring us the wine that comes in great supply from Thrace  
each day over the tireless sea, and is stored in your tents,  
as you are king over a great many people. And while  
the wisest of us sit together, we will deliberate,  
and determine the best plan. This we must do, close as we are  
to the enemy’s many fires blazing across the plain—  
which is no sight to please any reasonable Achaean.  
This night we shall deliberate, this night shall decide our fate :  
whether we will lead ourselves into ruin, or save ourselves.”

Thus spoke Nestor, and all the men heard and obeyed.  
The watchmen, then, were chosen, and fitted themselves in armour  
with haste, standing round Nestor’s powerful son Thrasymedes;  
and round Ascalaphus and Ialmenus, both exceptional  
warriors; and round Meriones the bloodthirsty one; and  
round Aphareus; and Deïpyrus; and son of Creon

δῖος Lycomedes. These seven warriors were ordered this night to captain one hundred young men each, each man armed with a long death-bringing spear. So they went, and collected in the gap between the deep trench and the high Wall, and sat down for the night. They lit a fire; and each man prepared for himself a late meal.

Meanwhile, Agamemnon, son of Atreus, led the elders inside his tent. There they sat together, and their commander placed before them an unusually satisfying feast : they were given the finest of everything. So they reached out their hands to the many gifts set before them; and when each man was satisfied with food and drink, then Nestor rose to his feet, and prepared to speak his mind. His wise words always persuaded the elders to his point of view, for they thought him the wisest of all Argive counsellors. So Nestor stood before the best minds of the army, and in all earnesty, the old man wove, with commanding words, a wise speech, that all heard, and admired :

“Most honoured commander of men Agamemnon,  
you shall be the beginning, foundation, and destination  
of my words, for you are king over many men,  
and Zeus has set the sceptre in your hand, to hold  
command; and all our military decisions, at the end,  
rest with you; thus you determine the way of many.  
Just as it is fitting for you to speak, and for us to hear,  
so it is fitting for you to listen, and hear your men;  
for the good they may speak, and the good that may result from it,  
will first and foremost bring glory to you. So I will now say  
what I think best. No man will produce a thought better than mine,  
because I’ve known it from the first, from the moment, long past now,  
when you, O Zeus-born commander of the people, robbed a girl,

Briseïs, from the tent of Achilles, and went your way with her,  
entirely against my judgment. You angered Achilles.

At that time I said much to dissuade you, but you followed your  
god-given prerogative, and unfortunately you angered  
our mightiest man, whom himself the gods also honour. But  
dishonour is what you showed him, for the whole army to see.  
Even now you hold the prize that Achilles has rightfully won.  
Now—Let us consider what to do about this. How may we  
mollify him? Perhaps with a favourable gift, and words  
of the greatest respect?”

And in answer to all this, king of men Agamemnon spoke :

“Old man, justly you have spoken of my blindness.  
Yours was a tale I did not enjoy to hear,  
for I deny none of it. As powerful as many  
armies put together is the one man whom Zeus  
respects in his heart, as he now befriends that man,  
and for that reason punishes the rest of us  
with the deaths of many fine Achaeans. That said,  
let us solve this. Since it was I who acted wrongly,  
and hurtful, when I followed a blind desire,  
it is for me to make good this problem, and pay  
this man back with many gifts, to conciliate him,  
and to retrace our steps back to the time of our  
friendship. Before all of you now I shall detail  
all the excellent gifts I plan to present to him.  
First, seven tripods, all solid gold, not yet marked  
by fire; and for those, twenty shining cauldrons.  
I shall give him ten gold measures. And twelve horses,  
each prize-winners—well-put-together, very fast.

Just the prizes themselves I've won from those horses  
in races, all those precious gold rewards, would be  
enough to satisfy any man. Also, I'll give him  
seven women excellent in household hand-work,  
women of Lesbos, whom I myself selected  
when that man plundered that beautiful island home,  
and I was there, and chose those seven women of  
astonishing beauty. Those seven shall be his  
to have, and, in addition, he can have the girl,  
the daughter of Briseus. And I am prepared  
to take a solemn oath that she and I never  
laid together in bed as men and women do,  
as is the common way of humankind. All these  
gifts will be ready for him at once, and all from  
my own personal store. Then, if this satisfies  
Zeus, and we obliterate Troy to dust, let him  
be first to choose among all the prizes that shall  
weigh down the Achaean ships when they sail home  
with the riches of Priam's Ilium. Let him  
choose first of the bronze and gold; and twenty women  
let him take before the rest of us begin to choose,  
the most beautiful women after Helen herself.

Yet if everything just enumerated does  
not please him, then, if we return to beautiful  
Argos, he shall be as a son to me, in honour  
and respect an equal to my natural-born  
Orestes; he shall be my son, raised in an a-  
bundance of good cheer, a darling son.  
I have three daughters in my magnificent halls,  
Chrysothemis, Laodice, and Iphianassa.

Let him choose one as adored wife, and require  
 no bridal gifts to settle on me; in fact, he shall  
 receive a dowry no daughter anywhere  
 has ever brought to her husband. I am prepared  
 to go further. Seven beautiful cities will  
 be his to control: Cardamyle; Enope;  
 Hire, a vast grassy place; and sacred Pherae;  
 and Antheia, with peaceful meadows even gods  
 frequent; and beautiful Aepeia; and Pedasus,  
 blessed with heavy grape vines. All of these cities  
 are spread out at the outermost edge of sandy  
 Pylos, and lie close to the sea. The good people  
 of these places are rich in cattle and sheep, and  
 will pay tribute to him as if to a god; and  
 he shall hold the sceptre there, his word shall be law,  
 and the good people will reverence him. All this  
 I will do for him, if only he brings his anger  
 to an end. Now it is the time for him to co-  
 operate. Is it not Hades himself who cannot  
 be bargained with? and thus is the most hateful god  
 to all of us alive? Let him now submit to me.  
 I am his commander. He must recognize my precedence."

And Nestor answered him :

"Most honoured commander of men Agamemnon,  
 those gifts you promise to give master Achilles  
 are not to be dismissed too quickly by any man.  
 So come now! let us choose messengers, and send them  
 to the tent of Peleus' son at once, and see  
 if we can change the mind of master Achilles.

Indeed, I shall choose the men; and may they comply with the council in this. First, let us have Phoenix, beloved of Zeus, lead the way— for δῖος Odysseus, and with him Ajax; and together with them shall go ministers Eurybates and Odios.

Now : let us have water for our hands, and keep silence while we pray to Zeus Supreme to show mercy to the Achaeans.”

Thus spoke Nestor, and all approved his Word. And the ministers purified the men in Agamemnon’s tent, pouring water over their hands; and boy-servants filled the mixing bowls with wine. Then the drinking cups were dealt out, each holding a few first drops, to make libation to Zeus. So the council of elders poured their offering to the god of victory and loss; then each man drank his own fill. When prayer was complete, the messengers started out into the night, but not without a last stern look for each from Nestor, who gave a most serious sidelong glance to Odysseus, to stress the importance of persuading the son of Peleus, their most pre-eminent warrior, to return to his position, and help preserve the army.

So Odysseus and the others walked along the seashore, where the waters of Earthshaking Poseidon roared up the sand; and the men looked to the waves, then to the stars, quick-whispering a prayer to Earthshaker to mollify the proud spirit of Achilles.

When they came to the tents of the Myrmidons, the mightily-antagonising soldiers of Achilles, they found the man himself stretched out peaceful on a couch, plucking a very pretty song from the clear-toned strings of a silver lyre, an exceptionally

finely hand-worked instrument, which he had taken from Thebe,  
after he'd obliterated that city of Briseïs' birth.

So Odysseus and Ajax, having entered the tent, watched  
Achilles soothe himself with an old song of heroic men.  
Patroclus, powerful soldier, lay at Achilles' feet,  
attending with widened eyes, awaiting the end of the song.

So Odysseus and Ajax, having entered the tent, stepped  
forward; so slowly Achilles turned his head to greet the two  
men. And languidly did Achilles—otherwise the quickest  
in battle—raise himself to his feet. And Patroclus likewise  
stood up. And Achilles looked very pleased to see the two men,  
and he spoke, saying :

"Welcome, dear friends. Indeed, dearest to me of all the Argives,  
whom otherwise I have no care to see. Odysseus, Ajax,  
you must have something exceedingly important to tell me,  
since you come here in the middle of the night, under the stars."

This Achilles said, as he led them further in, and offered  
them soft couches and sea-purple rugs, and the two messengers  
sat down while their host spoke to Patroclus, who stood close by him :

"Set out our largest bowl. Spare much of the water. We'll take it  
strong, in honour of my affection for these men, who now sit  
under my roof."

So Achilles spoke, and Patroclus heard his friend, and obeyed.  
He set down a chopping-block by the warm glow of the fire,  
and he set on this the back-pieces of a sheep and fat goat,



and also the backbone of a great hog; these were the richest and tenderest cuts of meat for them to feast on, and Achilles carved them up into little bits, and carefully spitted them, while good Patroclus brought the fire up to a blaze. Then when the flames had died down, and the embers glowed red-hot, Patroclus levelled them out, then laid the spits on racks over the rising heat, and sprinkled the meat with salt. When the pieces were roasted and put onto platters, Patroclus brought out a wicker basket of bread and set it on the table, and then Achilles served the meal. He sat down opposite Odysseus πολύμητις, and requested of Patroclus to give a gift to the gods; so his friend tossed some pieces of victims into the fire. Thus they reached out their hands to the refreshment set before them; and when each man was satisfied with food and drink, then Ajax nodded to Odysseus, who filled his cup with wine, and raised it in honour of Achilles, and said to him :

“Friend Achilles, I have feasted well this night, first in the tent of commander Agamemnon, and now in yours, where the abundance is incomparably satisfying. But we didn’t come here to talk about food. Greatest Achilles, beloved of Zeus, we’re here to remark on our terror of utter destruction. Unless you put on your armour we doubt if we’ll keep our ships from going up in flames. The goddamn Trojans are so confident in their strength just now that their army is spread over the plain, settled too close to our Wall for comfort. They sit by their fires and their confidence insults us as much as it threatens us. And what if they come for our ships at dawn? Then where will we be? Zeus shows them favourable omens, not us, with his lightnings; so madman Hector gloats in his strength as he pares down our numbers, his fury equal to the entire fury of combat

out there. He's relying on Zeus, so respects no other god,  
 nor any man opposite him, and will fight and rage until  
 he's had his fill. We're sure he's praying for daybreak, so he can  
 carve up our ships, take their figureheads as trophies, and burn all  
 else, and in the thick smoke cut us down and hack us to pieces.

So this is where we are. If the god fulfils his rage, I fear  
 we'll all die here, and I don't want that; I want to see my home  
 again. So put on your armour—if you care to pull us back  
 from the fire, all the sons of the Achaeans who are suffering.  
 Do not do now what you may regret later, for it can never  
 be undone, neither your sorrow, nor our deaths. Before that happens,  
 think how you may save us all from the coming day of evil.

Friend Achilles, I was there when your father Peleus charged  
 you to leave your home, leave Phthia, and go with Agamemnon  
 to war. I remember his words : 'My son,' he said, 'great strength shall  
 be yours, at the will of Athena and Hera, if they choose;  
 so restrain your fiery heart—for kindness is always better—  
 and bring no trouble to your friends : for trouble is dangerous,  
 trouble can grow; so be kind, and Argives young and old will give  
 you honour past belief.' This is what Peleus said, yet you  
 fail to remember it. Set your misplaced rage in the right  
 direction! Listen now and hear how Agamemnon intends  
 to order things rightly. To tell the tale of all the precious  
 gifts he wishes to give you would exhaust the tongue of our best  
 singer of songs. Seven brand-new tripods; ten measures of gold;  
 twelve horses, all prize-winners in speed (he says all the prizes  
 he's won from them are wealth enough to satisfy even him).  
 He'll give you seven women from Lesbos well-skilled in housework,  
 whom he'd taken for himself on the day you stormed the island;

he admits their beauty was the most exceptional of all  
 the spoils. All these will be yours, and the daughter of Briseus.  
 He'll say he'll swear an oath he never got into bed with her.

So everything will be ready for your hand immediately.

Also, if after all this the gods permit us to reduce  
 Troy down to dust, more gifts shall await your hands and your pleasure.  
 You can take what you like of the Trojan gold and bronze before  
 we begin to divide it up; and you can choose twenty Trojan  
 women second in beauty only to Helen. Achilles,  
 I am not yet done. If the Argives get out of here alive,  
 he says you'll be his son. He says he'll honour you equally  
 to Orestes. You'll be to him a 'a darling son', so he said,  
 and enjoy all the abundance his natural son relishes.

And still the king of gods and men had not yet rounded out his  
 promises. He spoke of his three daughters living in his halls,  
 Chrysothemis and Laodice and Iphianassa.  
 'Let him choose one as adored wife,' he said, 'and require  
 no bridal gifts to settle on me; in fact, he shall receive  
 a dowry no daughter anywhere has ever brought to her  
 husband.' He said this, and went on. Seven beautiful cities  
 will be yours : Cardamyle, Enope, Hire, Pherae, Antheia,  
 Aepeia, and Pedasus. All these lie outside sandy Pylos,  
 and are near to the sea. The men there are rich with sheep and cattle,  
 and he claims they will pay tribute to you 'as if to a god'.  
 You'll hold the sceptre of these cities, and your word will be law.

All this is yours, if only you will put away your anger."

So spoke Odysseus, who then said one word more :

“My good friend, it is clear on your face that your hate for the son of Atreus is just too great, him and his gifts—but show pity for the rest of us; the Trojans have worn down the Achaeans. Do this for us, and you *will* be honoured as a god; you will raise yourself up high. You may even take Hector’s life, since he has no fear of coming forward in his deadly rages. He says there is none among the Danaans who can face him and live.”

And quick-moving Achilles replied :

“Odysseus, I’ll tell you how it is plain. Then you can stop twittering on and on about this and that in my face. That man has all the appeal to me as the open gates of Hades. Whatever he says, he’s always hiding more. I don’t believe him and don’t care to. Hear now my answer to his offer : no. I will not be convinced, not by any son of Atreus, nor any Danaan. Where was the gratitude for *me* trimming enemy numbers day by day without rest? I do and do and could end up dead by men I do not know or care to know. Every day I risked everything to fight for no reason of mine; but where was the respect? And now, like a bird holding a beak of food for her chicks, though she herself feels agonies of want, so your hungry leader seeks to drop some morsels down my throat, to make me forget all of my bloody fighting against men protecting their women.”

So said Achilles, and rose from the table. So the other men also stood. They watched him pace his tent, his anger rising as he spoke :

“I’ve taken twenty-three cities around Troy for that man—twelve  
 with my ships, eleven on foot with my Myrmidons. I can  
 destroy anything any which way and every Achaean  
 knows it. I’ve carried off whole cities’-worth of valuables,  
 and every time I’d drop it all at Agamemnon’s feet—the  
 son of child-loving Atreus (he who would have given you  
 a sure feast to remember, with human flesh stuck in your teeth).  
 While our commander stays behind with the fleet, himself propped  
 up like one of the ships, I’m killing his enemies, and my  
 reward is to watch him take all the riches I’ll stolen for him  
 and pluck out the best, always the best. Then our commander would  
 leave the scraps for the rest of us to divide among the many.  
 Meanwhile, he’s passing out some of his pile to other kings  
 and nobles, which brings him applause; and unless I’m mistaken,  
 all those fine kings and nobles still have their gifts I’ve won for them.  
 But from me he takes the finest prize of all I’ve won—my wife!

I use that word because she was unusually pleasing  
 to me. That girl has a way of getting into your heart through  
 no effort of her own. . . .

I don’t care to hear any solemn  
 oaths! Let him have her—every which way of his own!”

And Achilles stopped, and looked into Odysseus’ eyes.  
 And Odysseus, who knew all this already, said not a word,  
 because Achilles began again :

“Why are we here at all? Who can tell me why the Achaeans  
 are fighting the Trojans? I can tell you. The sons of Atreus  
 gathered an army together and brought it here for the sake

of 'fair-haired' Helen. We're here fighting for a stolen wife, and during all this Agamemnon steals mine? Do I alone ask all these questions? Are the sons of Atreus the only men who love their wives? I don't think so. And any sensible man who loves his wife protects his wife, and cares for her. And so I loved mine, and cared for her entirely; though all who know nothing of these things will say she was only a 'war-prize' and a 'slave'. But we here know the truth."

And ferocious Achilles radiated rage as he said :

"That man stole her from me. He has cheated me. It would be best for him to test me no further. I know him, and he will not move me, nor cheat me, ever again."

And Achilles stopped, and no one there yet spoke in answer. He then sat down, so all sat down with him; and he continued, saying :

"Friend Odysseus, you and the other leaders must figure out a way to keep your precious ships from burning down to ash. Much has already been done without me. He has raised a wall, and dug a ditch by it, wide and deep, with sharp-tipped stakes in there; yet all that can't keep man-killing Hector back. But when I stood on the plain, Hector couldn't get much farther than the oak tree by the Scaean gate. He tried to come on once and barely escaped with his life. He's met me now, and he's happy to be alive.

So then. Since I have no plans to face δῖος Hector, tomorrow I shall sacrifice to Zeus and the other gods, pile up my victims on my ships, and sail away. If you care to see me go, it will be at earliest dawn. In three days I'll be

home. Many treasures I'll be leaving behind me in this damned place; but many more I'll be bringing home with me : gold, red bronze, grey iron, shapely women—all that was fairly given me in the division of things. But the greatest prize given me has been taken back, and in its place I was given terrible disrespect. So please deliver my answer to the kingly Agamemnon, son of Atreus. And let all the Achaeans hear it, to make them hate him, and beware his treacherous ways, in case he's already planning his next deception on someone, since his shamelessness is unending. You see he dares not come himself and look me in the face. He is a dog, a coward.

Let him think for himself, and act on his own, because he shall get no further help from me. I don't give rewards to those who cheat me; and don't lend my hand to those who show me disrespect. His days of deceiving me with words are over; he has carried it far enough, and more than enough, to 'satisfy' him, I think. When Hector sends him to hell, he can take his riches with him. What other value has he, since King Zeus has stolen his mind? As for his gifts, it makes me ill to hear of them; I'd rather have a sack of animal shit. If he gave me ten times, if he gave me twenty times the amount of everything he has, and if he added to that who knows how much from wherever, all the wealth up in Orchomenus' house—I don't care where—or every last precious trinket in Egyptian Thebes—Thebes where all the houses overflow with valuables, and where the men advance two hundred each, with chariots and horses, out through the city's hundred gates—not if he gave me gifts in number to equal the sands of the sea, or the dust—Agamemnon will not have me, not till he's paid for the outrage he did me, in full. And I wouldn't marry any daughter of any

son of Atreus even if she outdoes golden Aphrodite  
 herself in beauty, not even if she has skills to rival  
 Athena Bright-Eyes, not even if she sparks unspeakable  
 lust in my every body part—even then I wouldn't go  
 near her. Let him marry off his deadweight to some Achaean  
 equal to his 'nobility', someone—anyone—far more  
 'royal' than myself. If the gods bring me home safe, my father  
 Peleus—yes, I already have a father; I'm a son,  
 I don't need Agamemnon to make me one—yes, Peleus  
 himself will find me a suitable wife. Many loveliest  
 Achaean women are everywhere in Hellas and Phthia,  
 the daughters of leaders who watch over the cities. From these  
 I shall choose of whomever I please to make my esteemed wife.  
 I could have married many times over already, and brought  
 old man Peleus all the wedding gifts my marriage grants him.  
 Does the son of Atreus truly believe I will trade my life  
 for gifts? A life is worth more than everything in Ilium  
 put together, far more than all those old treasures we've heard of,  
 gathered here when times were peaceful, before the Achaeans came.  
 My life's worth more than all the treasures heaped up past the marble  
 doorway to Apollo's home in rocky Pytho! If I want  
 cattle or sheep, I'll raid someplace for them. A tripod or horse,  
 I'll trade for one. But all the valuables on earth can't give me more  
 life, not once I've breathed it out, and it's gone. I can't raid the air  
 for it, nor make a trade, equitable or otherwise. For  
 my mother Thetis of the sea told me something I've never  
 yet said aloud to anyone. She told me my way to death  
 has not one but two roads. If I stay in Troy and fight, I will die,  
 but win glorious fame everlasting. But if I return  
 to my home and homeland, I will live long, but lost is my fame.  
 Once death ends me, I'll be forgotten, utterly and forever."



At that, Achilles withdrew from the table, and stood staring into the fire. No one dared speak; and Odysseus waited.

“If I were you,” so Achilles continued, “I would set sail for home immediately. Lofty Troy will not fall to hopes. Zeus has shown his hand over their heads, and they are encouraged.

So go to the wise Achaean elders, report what I’ve said, fulfil your duty as loyal soldiers, and tell them they need a better plan—unless they prefer to see all their men dead. Because my anger has not been eased by your contribution.”

So spoke Achilles, and all the men there wondered at his words. Indeed, old man Phoenix, who’d been standing guard outside the tent, now burst in, with tears streaming down his face, for he had heard it all, as Achilles’ voice, full of passion, had travelled far. And venerable Phoenix, terrified at the loss of the ships, spoke out, saying :

“Dearest Achilles! If your awful rage has set your heart for home, if you scorn to defend our ships from fire, what, dear child, will I do here without you, alone? Remember, it was I whom Peleus sent you to, on your way out from Phthia to Agamemnon, a lovely little child knowing nothing of war’s evil arts, nor of assemblies where men rise and distinguish themselves. Peleus trusted me to educate you in all good ways of words and deeds. Dear child, if you go, I will not stay without you in this terrible place, not even if a god should promise to scrape the years off and give me back my blessed youth, back when

I first left Hellas καλλιγύναικα, on the run from my father Amyntor—son of Ormenus—who raged at me over his heavenly beautiful concubine, whom he loved so much he ignored his wedded wife, my mother; so she was always down on her knees, begging me to take that woman myself, so that my father might feel disgust for her, and give her up.”

And old man Phoenix sat down in a chair, and continued :

“So I did as my mother asked; but my father soon found out, and angrily called down all the horror of the awful Furies on my head, praying that I would go childless. It was a curse that turned out considerable, you might say, because a child of my own has never sat on my own knees. Evidently the gods heard my father—Zeus Underworld (for he occupies everywhere at once) and hateful Persephone of Hades, though some hail her as a goddess of spring, ‘bringer of fruit’, though I’ve never understood that part of it. (Was that justice, what happened to me? A lifetime of thought, and still I don’t know.) Well then. My father simply declaring the curse to my face was bad enough, so I thought then, so I planned to lift my sword and kill him. But a god came to me—I never knew which one—who lowered my hand, and let my anger go, and put a voice in my mind of the people and their many common despisings, and I decided the reputation of a father-killer among the Achaeans was not the finest solution for me. This alternative was better : to just leave my home forever, and bid farewell to my angry father. But my friends and the rest of my family begged me to stay, and prayed for me, slaughtering many goodly sheep, and twist-horned cattle; and many fat hogs were stretched over the fire and singed clean

of their bristles; and many jars of the old man's wine was drunk.  
 For nine nights, like soldiers on watch they sat by my sleeping body.  
 They took it in turns, and let no fires burn down, neither the one  
 by my bedchamber door, nor the one lighting up the courtyard.  
 But then the tenth night came. It was pitch-black out, and I unsealed  
 the lock on my door and set myself loose, easily leaping  
 the courtyard wall; and no one saw me go, neither maids nor men.  
 Aye, long ago that was, when I fled far off through broad Hellas.  
 Phthia was a beautiful spot in my eyes, so I stopped there,  
 with its deep soil and many flocks; and King Peleus himself  
 received me kindly into his palace, and loved me as a son,  
 and made me rich, giving me the land of the Dolopians  
 to rule, there on the far edge of Phthia. But before that gift,  
 I raised you as a young brother to manhood, and now you are  
 godlike Achilles. I loved you then just as I love you now.  
 Back then, at the feast I would set you on my knees, and give you  
 the first cut of the roast meat, and hold up the cup to your lips.  
 And many a time in your childishness you dribbled the wine  
 out all down my tunic. Ah, how much have I suffered and worked  
 for your happiness, all the time knowing the gods would never  
 give me a natural son of my own! Ah, godlike Achilles!  
*You* were my son to me. Now you must think of *me*, and save *me*.  
 It's not in you to be cruel, child—not to your friends; I know this.  
 So I beg you to get a hold of yourself, and put that rage  
 away. The very gods themselves change their minds, if they choose it,  
 if they think it right; and the gods are our exemplars of all  
 goodness and glory and strength. A mere man himself can alter  
 a god's intent, by sending incense rising along with the scent  
 of sacrifice up to heaven, and the pouring of the wine  
 down to earth; and thereby one man's sin may be made good, at least  
 in God's eyes. For just as I took you, Achilles, for my son,

so Zeus hears our prayers as if from his daughters whom he takes  
 to his heart, though they be limping, and stricken in look, and with  
 eyes downturned—the very picture of a man depressed in shame.  
 These prayers keep on regardless, and follow the steps of Sin;  
 they make it their business to do so. But Sin always outruns them,  
 and is always ahead of them—*for often a person does,*  
*before a person understands*—so Sin swiftly encompasses  
 the earth entire, and only here and there our prayers flicker,  
 while men all over fall. Thus, one day their prayers come, too,  
 seeking a remedy for the pain inside them, and a return  
 to goodness. So more prayers are heard in heaven, but only  
*some* are blessed by God as he would his daughters. Because the man  
 who denies goodness on earth obstinately, repeatedly,  
 —*his* prayers are refused, and that prayer becomes its own curse,  
 because when Zeus will not listen, the Goddess of Ruin comes  
 down, and the man suffers terrible repayment. Achilles,  
*bend*, as Zeus bends to his own daughters, as all good men follow  
 the good, if they know how to. Hear now my word on this point.  
 If son of Atreus weren't offering you gifts, and promising you  
 many more, but raging in enduring anger, I would never  
 ask you to free your own rage and fight to defend the Argives,  
 who are in desperate times. And not only does he offer you  
 countless gifts, but he has sent to your tent the best of the army,  
 who also happen to be your closest friends here. There is no  
 man in the whole army who doesn't acknowledge your grievance;  
 but, just now, be calm, and bring no shame on the words and mission  
 of these two warriors. We have all heard told many stories  
 of heroes of old times, who, though enraged almost to madness,  
 would cool at the sight of gifts, and be won over by fair words.  
 All this brings to mind an old story, a very old story,  
 and I will tell it now just as it was, here among my friends.

There was a tribe of men called the Curetes, upon once a time.  
They lived with the battle-hardened Aetolians side by side.  
One time these two tribes were fighting for the city Calydon,  
the Aetolians defending it, and, hoping to ruin  
it, the now-forgotten Curetes, who were no easy foe,  
and had an ally in Artemis, who, from her golden throne,  
had let out a plague over the city, enraged that its king,  
Oeneus the wine-maker, had failed her, forgetting  
to give her the first fruits from his sunniest orchard. The other  
gods all feasted on his offerings of oxen, and the archer  
huntress alone was left out. Whether he simply forgot her,  
or had no care, he had committed a terrible error.  
So the plague she sent Calydon was a ferocious wild boar  
with deadly bright-white tusks; this freak of the gods had singular  
knowledge of things, and knew how to couch in grass unseen amid  
men, and over and over worked evil on the orchard land,  
which greatly vexed Oeneus. This monster could uproot a tree  
roots and all, and on many a morning the men came to see  
multitudes of tall trees lying row on row, dead on the ground,  
from lowest root-tip to highest-blooming fruit. Meleager,  
Oeneus' son, brought down the boar, after he summoned round  
him, from many cities, the best manner of huntsman and hound;  
for not just any sort of man could kill this godlike monster,  
so huge it was; and many of its would-be killers ended up dead.  
But after the boar was finally extinguished, the city's  
deadly troubles were only beginning, because the Curetes  
came on, with great war-noise and shouting, hoping to steal the head  
and hide of the godly monster from hero Meleager,  
who lived in the city of Calydon. As long as he warred  
with the Curetes, leading an army of many behind him,

Meleager defended the city, and kept the foe back from  
 its walls. But then the fortunes of the city of Calydon  
 changed, when its hero Meleager swelled with indignation;  
 it was a rage any man might feel, however wise at heart.  
 The cause of this was his mother Althaea. The argument  
 kept Meleager at home beside his wife Cleopatra,  
 beautiful daughter of Marpessa, herself the fair daughter  
 of Euenos, and of Idas, the mightiest man on earth  
 then alive at the time. Now mighty Idas had to fight with  
 Apollo Far-Shooter for the hand of shapely Marpessa,  
 so lifted his heavy bow, but Zeus let her chose her lover  
 herself, for reasons of his own. But for a time she was gone  
 off with Apollo, who had stolen her, and, left in their home,  
 her parents renamed her Alcyone, the name of the bird  
 who calls out shrilly, the kingfisher; for her dear mother's sad  
 sighs were many and long. So, as I was saying : beside his wife  
 Cleopatra, Meleager stayed at home, seething with rage  
 at his dear mother Althaea, unable to dismiss  
 from his mind the curse she'd uttered when he killed one of his brothers,  
 for a reason I cannot remember at all. But I know  
 she beat the gracious earth with her fists, calling the gods below,  
 Hades and awful Persephone, having sunk to her knees,  
 drenched in tears, calling on the Furies who walk in darkness  
 to come up from Erebus and bring painful death to her son,  
 which the female Furies love to do. So the battle-din  
 was enormous close to the city gates, and its high walls shook;  
 and inside, the Aetolian elders prayed : 'What would it take,  
 Meleager,' they asked, 'to rise and fight?' They promised the best  
 piece of land all round was his, full fifty acres of a tract  
 divided in two, half vineyard, half plough-land, cut just for him  
 out of the public land. So old king Oeneus implored him,

standing at the door of his son's lofty bedchamber, shaking  
the well-fitted doors; and his sisters and dear mother, joining  
in the prayer, added to the noise, yet he refused them all  
the more, and his best friends tried, and failed, and he would not call  
out an answer to anyone until at last his bedchamber  
rocked with the onslaught of the Curetes, a great scaler  
of walls; and they were setting fires all throughout the city.  
Then his stately wife begged him to imagine the enemy  
having its way with the wives of the dead men : led off as slaves,  
his wife and children, is the least of woes after the fires  
have reduced the city to ash and levelled it with the dust.  
So he put on his armour, even as he heard his wife speak  
her evil words, and, glittering all round, he went forth to seek  
some of the enemy to kill. Thus, obeying his own heart,  
he saved his people from death on the day of evil. But  
he never did get the gifts that were promised, as I recall it.  
Even so, as it is, he saved his people from destruction.

My friend, my child, give up this rage in your heart; it will lead  
to nothing good. Do not let heaven lead you in this, for it  
may not be heavenly to be led in this way. Once the ships  
are on fire it will be that much more harder to save ourselves  
from comprehensive death. So why not take all the gifts offered  
you, and fight? And in your splendour you will be honoured as a god.  
But if you dismiss his gifts and leave, you will lose out on lustre  
that would be yours afterwards."

And Achilles answered him :

"Phoenix, father, beloved of Zeus, that 'lustre' you speak of  
is unimportant to me. I have gifts already, from Zeus :

this generous strength of mine shall stay mine as long as I live, even as the ships burn. And hear this Word I now say to you, and take it to heart : stop all this weeping and wailing to please the son of Atreus, and have him get his way. You ought not show him love, for you might lose mine. If you're with me, father, you'll show my enemy the same hatred I have for him. So, if you wish it, the honour given me by Zeus is yours to share. The others here shall deliver my message. You stay with me in my tent, and lay yourself on this soft couch. At dawn we will return to the question : do I stay, or do I go?"

At these words from Achilles, Patroclus nodded in silence, and began preparing a bed for old man Phoenix, spreading thick blankets over the couch—all this a sign for the others that they should leave the hut at once.

So godlike Ajax now spoke out, saying :

"Odysseus," he said, "let's go. Our command is finished here. Our purpose cannot be accomplished; and we should deliver the bad news to the Danaans now, who await our return. We've heard cruel and perverse words in this tent tonight. One thing I know for certain is that we honour Achilles as the best among us, but that isn't enough for him to consider the rest of us by the fragile ships. He is a cold and pitiless man. A brother is killed, or a son dies untimely, and the killer pays a price for his deed, then stays in the land without fear of reprisal, for the proud hearts of the dead one's family are restrained by the settlement of recompense. Such is one way of justice among men. As for mighty Achilles, along with godlike strength Zeus gave you an evil, stubborn heart.



All this is happening because of one girl, when we offer you seven? Seven that are far the best we have? And offer to you many more gifts besides them? No, Achilles, be kind, show respect to your people—for we have come to you tonight from all the men of the army. We three are the best of friends; we must be able to make a pledge to satisfy us all.”

And Achilles replied :

“Ajax, all your words make perfect sense. But my heart swells with rage whenever I think of that person, how the son of Atreus brought all this on needlessly, on me and on all the Argives, as though I were a stranger without any worth or rights. Go now and deliver my message. I shall draw no blood in war until Priam’s son, the warlike δῖος Hector, is standing outside my tent, having come down here after killing many Achaeans, and is setting my ships aflame. Here at my tent, beside my ship, I think δῖος Hector will be stopped for good.”

So spoke Achilles. Thus, two-handled cups were given to each, and each poured out a libation; then Odysseus stormed out of the tent, leading the way back beside the beached ships overlooking the restless waves of the sea.

Meanwhile, Patroclus requested of his companions and handmaidens to spread out a comfortable couch for old Phoenix; and they heard, and prepared a bed of many layers : fleeces, blanket, and the finest linen sheet, soft on the skin. There the old man rested till the coming of radiant Dawn.

The tent, well-put-together, had an inmost part where Achilles

slept; beside him lay Diomedes, beautifully shapely,  
 whom he'd brought with him from Lesbos. In another bed in this  
 recess lay Patroclus, beside the beautifully shapely  
 Iphigeneia, whom δῖος Achilles had given him when he sacked  
 steep Scyros, the kingship of Enyeus, a son of Dionysus.

Now, when the others returned to the huts of Atreus' son,  
 the Achaean leaders rose together and raised golden cups  
 in honour of their return. And commander of the army  
 Agamemnon made official enquiry, asking of them :

"What did he say? Come now! Mighty Odysseus,  
 man of many victories! Is the man willing  
 to defend our ships from the destructive fire?  
 Or did he say no, and still fulminates in rage?"

So Odysseus of many victories answered him :

"Son of Atreus, most honoured of Achaeans, Agamemnon  
 king of men, the man said no. He is not willing to calm down.  
 The proposal we brought irritated his rage all the more.  
 He refuses you and all your gifts. The man advises you  
 to think up your own plan to save the ships and the Achaean  
 men. He threatens to draw his ships into the sea at first light  
 and sail for home. He encouraged us to do the same,  
 considering the war is now unwinnable. Lofty Troy  
 shall not fall, he says, because Zeus holds his hand over their heads,  
 so they think they have an edge, and fill with death-bringing courage.  
 He told us you should hear this, which Ajax can confirm, and the  
 two wise ministers. But the man invited Phoenix to rest  
 for the night on a soft couch there, in the vestibule of his tent,

so that tomorrow he may board one of his ships and follow him away from here, if he so chooses; for the man will not take Phoenix away against his will.”

Thus spoke Odysseus, and all the men had lowered their cups and stood in silence, wondering at the brunt of the message. Then for a long while each man stood thoughtful in the troubled silence, all these heroic sons of the Achaeans, until Diomedes spoke :

“Son of Atreus, most glorious king of men Agamemnon, we shouldn’t have done that—beg δῖος Achilles to return, nor offer him gifts, however many; for the man is full of himself at the best of times, and our begging has only fixed him in his purpose. But hear me now. Achilles will go or he will stay, and in the heat of the battle we’ll leave him to decide for himself. Where is it written that we need him for certain to win? If some god motivates him to join us, so be it. But come now! Allow me to tell us where we stand. Now we must fortify ourselves one last time with bread and wine, for these will bring us strength and courage; and when early Dawn comes we will quickly gather the men and chariots together in front of the ships, and you, leader of men Agamemnon, must rouse them, and fight in the front-lines yourself, to inspire us.”

So spoke Diomedes, and the leaders agreed with his Word. So the libation was poured, then each man returned to his tent, and lay down, and relaxed into the god-given gift of sleep.

End of Book IX

## Book X

All night long the leaders of the Achaean army rested in their tents, unable to release their worries from their mind, and sleep; though all around them their army of warriors lay quiet in oblivious slumber. The watchmen alone were moving through the Argive camp beside the agitated sea and their vulnerable ships. And the commander of the army Agamemnon lay agitated on his couch, unable to sleep like all the other leaders, for thoughts ran on and on rampant through his restless mind. Finally he rose up, and flung round himself a blazing yellow-gold lion-skin that reached down to his feet, vestige of a great and fierce beast; then fitted his shining armour round his shoulders and body; then took his spear and went to the Wall, and looked out on the broad Scamander plain.

As when the sky flashes with lightning flung by Hera's husband, anticipatory of the falling of heavy rain, or hail of prodigious size, or snow—little snowflakes that together cover all the fields as one chill blanket—so each thought that came to Agamemnon gathered as a burden within him; and sighs arose from the depths of his heart; and he noted his body trembling as his eyes took in the Trojan lines, with their fires burning, and the sound of flutes, and the mingled voices of men. Then his massive heart burst with pent-up emotion, sending out a terrible moan, as the ancient seawaves moan; and he turned to his fragile ships, then looked down at his hand, and found there a handful of hair torn at the roots, which he hadn't even noticed he'd done. He sighed at the sight of it, then decided to go to Nestor, hoping the older man might plan with him a crafty way to keep back the Trojans from the precious ships.

Just so was his brother Menelaus unable to sleep;  
 he, too, trembled, in terror that for his sake the Achaean  
 warriors, who braved the deep salt sea to come to Troy to fight,  
 now faced destruction. So he rose up from bed, and covered his  
 massive shoulders in a spotted leopard's skin, and lifted to  
 his head his shining bronze helmet, and took his death-bringing spear  
 into his grip. Then he left his tent to wake up his brother,  
 whom he now found hastening through the night, in full battle array.

And Menelaus, happy to see his brother, spoke out :

"Good brother," he asked, "why are you armed? Have you a plan to spy  
 out enemy positions from up close? That's a daring deed  
 to undertake, to mingle with the enemy at night. Who  
 here is bold enough for the task? It will be a man of great  
 courage and cunning."

And Agamemnon king of men replied :

"Menelaus, you and I require some crafty thinking,  
 here and now, if we're to save everything—ships, ourselves, and all  
 else; for it is plain that Zeus has turned his eye away from us.  
 Evidently he prefers the sacrifices Hector sends  
 up. (It would be well for us to learn his procedure.) Never  
 I have seen or heard tell of what that one man did in one day.  
 He handed us many horrible sights and the Achaeans  
 are fairly worried. All this he did to us just as he is,  
 for he is no son of any god or goddess. Still and all,  
 Zeus finds him appealing. These works of his will live on in men's  
 words for times to come, to the shame of all Achaeans, perhaps

till the end of time. Well then. Come! Run down the ships and summon Ajax and Idomeneus. I'm to get Nestor out of bed. This night we work. I keep thinking about our outposts; I feel the Trojans close, and I want all our watchmen alert. They'll listen to Nestor's Word; his son is the captain of the guards, he and Meriones, Idomeneus' second; it was I who gave them this command. We must have confidence that they will serve their assignment well."

And Menelaus replied :

"What are you saying? What is the specific command for now? And shall I stay out there by the Wall, and wait for you to come? Or do you want me back here, once I've delivered the orders I'm waiting to hear of."

And Agamemnon answered him :

"Stay by the Wall. On the way, raise your voice and wake every man we have; and be sure to address them most formally, each man with both family and father's name, giving honour to everyone. And don't question this herald's work of yours; we'll both be busy tonight, and no task is too small if it serves to save the whole. Why Zeus prepared all this heavy grief for us on the guiltless day of our birth is a question we'll return to, if we live."

Thus spoke Agamemnon, then specified his brother's command for the watchmen to stay alert. So Menelaus rushed off to fulfil his charge, while Agamemnon, the commander of the army, went to worthy Nestor's tent, seeking counsel. He found the old man sleeping on his soft bed outside under the stars, with his arms and armour lying beside him within

hand's reach, including his shield, and two spears, and shining helmet,  
 and his warrior's belt, which he daily fitted to himself  
 when he prepared for combat, where men are destroyed right and left.  
 Daily he led his men forward, having no thought of old age.  
 At the sound of Agamemnon's approach, he lifted his head  
 up onto his elbow, and spoke out :

"Who is this, creeping alone by the ships under cover  
 of night, when sensible men are sleeping? Are you looking  
 for a mule that's bolted? Are you looking for a friend?  
 Speak out and say your business here. What do you want of me?"

And king of men Agamemnon answered him in a whisper :

"Nestor, son of Neleus, head and hand of the Achaeans,  
 do you not recognize Agamemnon?"

"Yes," Nestor answered, "I recognize king of men Agamemnon.  
 But why is king of men Agamemnon creeping alone by  
 the ships, and waking me up out a sound sleep?"

And Agamemnon answered :

"Nestor, I have a terrible fear that the Argives face ruin.  
 Thoughts of war keep me awake, and the troubles of our army.  
 Right now I don't know what to think, except that Zeus has thrown me  
 into continual trouble; and every day I live I  
 sink deeper into it. Enough then of trouble! I feel a  
 trembling in me and my heart is ready to burst out as if  
 on the tip of a bloody spear. I must act, and make things right;  
 if it's not too late. If you want to help, since you can't sleep either,

come now with me down to the watchmen. We must ensure they stay vigilant. For all we know they may have forgotten their orders and lie sleeping, leaving us open to attack. The enemy is close, and we know nothing of their plans. They may come at us any time now, using the dark, and strike down our sleeping men."

And Nestor answered him :

"Son of Atreus, I think Zeus Orderer will not grant Hector all that the man now confidently expects shall be. Did you not just explain to me how inconstant are the ways of God? I think his troubles will exceed our own by far—if only great Achilles himself will wake up, as we are now awake. He must drain away the rage from his heart; and fighting is good for that. But we must wait for the man to come to his senses, as I now have. So I will get up and come with you. And I think we should waken others as well. The son of Tydeus should rise, and Odysseus, and Ajax, and Meges. A boy should be sent at once to wake Ajax and Idomeneus; their ships are far down the line and no quick walk. All our bravest and strongest must awake. But, you must allow me a moment to unconceal my anger for Menelaus. That he's your brother, and honoured by all, just now will not keep back my words, howbeit I speak them into the face of Agamemnon, whose anger is no small thing. Look how I'm awake, yet that man sleeps! And the king has been left to repair this trouble himself! It would be most proper of all just now to be woken up by Menelaus. He is the one who should be busying himself with prayer, and meeting with the Achaean leaders; for this trouble can no longer be endured, if we're waking in the night to fix it."



And king of men Agamemnon replied :

“Your lordship, hereafter I will gladly give you all the time in the world to damn him. It’s very much true he shows little effort, both in thought and act; yet he’s neither lazy nor dumb : he’s just always looking at me and waiting to follow my lead. But tonight he was different; he was awake even before I was. And I’ve already sent him to summon some you’ve mentioned. So up then! We’ll find him with the watchmen by the gates, for that’s the meeting place for now.”

And Nestor answered him :

“Very good,” he said. “For that reason no Argive should take it ill when addressed by him, or even given direct orders. I’d say that’s important, since he’s a leader of the army.”

That said, he slipped his old bones into an elegant tunic, and buckled fair sandals to his feet; and flung a purple cloak around him, broad and folded double, its fine fleecy wool puffing him up; and he fastened it with a golden pin. Then he put a sharp, death-pointed spear in a fist, and went off dutifully down the lines of the Achaean warriors’ ships; all the while noting the enemy campfires lighting up the sky above the plain.

First then, Odysseus, Zeus’ rival in thought, Nestor roused from sleep with raised shrill voice. So at once Odysseus awoke and came from the hut and spoke out to the man, asking of him :

“Why are you acting this way by the ships, alone in the night?  
What need is so great that you come here to bring me to my feet?”

And Nestor answered him :

“Zeus-born son of Laertes, subtle-minded Odysseus,  
show me no anger. I come because we are in great danger,  
the entire Achaean army. So follow with me, that  
we may wake all men whom we think may make contribution  
to a decision we must settle on tonight : to flee, or fight.”

This he said. So Odysseus πολύμητις went back in  
to his hut and buckled his intricately carved shield around  
his shoulders; then they moved on down the line.

So they came to Diomedes, son of Tydeus. They found  
him outside his hut by his arms and armour; and around him  
slept his soldiers with their heads upon their shields. And each man’s spear  
was fixed in the ground upright, so when their bronze tips caught the fire  
light, like sudden bolts of lightning their gleaming was visible  
from far off down the line, as if Zeus himself was speaking out.  
But Diomedes was sleeping. Beneath him he had spread out  
the skin of an great ox that had once lived in the fields. His head,  
meanwhile, rested on a richly embroidered rug rolled up  
under him as a pillow. So Nestor came to stand by him,  
and looked down in disgust, and touched him with the heel of his foot.  
Diomedes instantly awoke to the sound of Nestor’s voice :

“Up, Diomedes, son of Tydeus! Do you plan to sleep  
all night? Are you not aware the Trojans are spread out over  
the rise on the plain, and have settled very close to our ships?

And between our forces, nothing much more than a strip of dirt  
holds them back?"

Thus Nestor. So Diomedes leapt up from sleep in a flash,  
and spoke out, saying :

"Cruel man! I was asleep! And aren't there younger Achaean sons  
to do this job of yours, waking up leaders in the middle  
of the night? Why do I ask? Worthy sir, everyone knows  
there is no arguing with you."

And old man Nestor replied :

"Indeed, child, you speak well. I have excellent sons; and many  
are the boy-messengers I could presently summon to pass  
my words through the camp. But know that we stand on a razor's edge,  
and any one moment now might decide it all, whether we  
live or die. So you go, then, for you are younger than I,  
and wake Ajax and Meges. Consider it a kindness to me."

Thus spoke Nestor. So Diomedes flung his lion-skin round  
his shoulders, and grabbed his shining spear, and left the tent to go  
rouse the heroes from sleep, and escort them to the meeting place.

So the Argive leaders assembled at the most critical  
position of the guard, where they found the watchmen wide awake  
beside their weapons. Just as sheep dogs keeping watch in farmyards  
grow still when a sound comes out of the trees, and they scent the wild  
beast that roams the hills and comes down to kill : so fierce motion breaks  
out, and the herdsmen, lately sleepy, come instantly alert :  
just so were the sharp-eyed guards attentive through the edgy night,

thinking nothing of sleep while they steadily scanned the plain  
for any sight or sound of the enemy moving in.

Old man Nestor was happy to see the watchmen awake,  
set there in an obscured position between Wall and trench,  
and encouraged them with spirited words :

“Keep on, dear children, keep watching! If sleep  
seizes you, you may wake to feel the pleasure  
of your enemy up close and personal.”

So said Nestor, advancing in haste, followed by the members  
of the council he’d summoned; and Meriones went along,  
and mighty Nestor’s son also, for these two were invited  
to contribute in deliberations. Together they went  
beyond the trench, and convened at a spot empty of corpses,  
for this was the place where colossal Hector had turned back  
when night fell. So the council of leaders sat down, and reasoned.

It was venerable Nestor who was first to speak, saying :

“Friends, who is bold enough to test his courage, and infiltrate  
the Trojan ground? To cut down any stragglers at our edges,  
or to hear talk among themselves of their leaders’ strategy?  
It would be valuable to know if they intend to hold position  
imminent to our ships; or plan to withdraw into the city,  
now that they’ve made harsh work of us. If he who learns this returns  
safe to reveal it, vast will be his fame among the army.  
And a great gift will be given him : each leader will donate  
a black ewe with lamb, so that no man here will possess such a  
multitude of trophies. Furthermore, this man will be sung of

at feasts and gatherings over the earth entire, one day  
when our tale is told. Who here is up to the challenge?"

So spoke Nestor, and was answered with silence.

Finally Diomedes spoke :

"Nestor, I'm happy to get up close and personal  
in the enemy camp. I'll go it alone, though  
a second man offers a second pair of eyes.  
This increases the vision of both, as each can  
tend his own direction; and the wider the sight,  
the sharper the plan. If I go alone, the work  
and formulation to be done goes slower."

Thus spoke Diomedes, and the two Ajaxes were ready  
to go with him, and Meriones was ready to go with  
him, and Nestor's son was ready to go, and Menelaus  
was ready to go, as was Odysseus πολύμητις ,  
for going down into the army of the Trojans appealed  
to the spirit of daring that forever drove his heart.

Then Agamemnon spoke :

"Diomedes, son of Tydeus, friend to me and to all  
Achaeans, you have the privilege to choose your second from all  
these mighty warriors. All of them are eager. Yourself choose  
the man best for the task, and weigh no other matter."

So spoke Agamemnon, to ensure his brother not be chosen  
improperly for the task.

And Diomedes answered him :

“I choose Odysseus.”

And Odysseus spoke to Diomedes, saying :

“Let’s go. The dark narrows as dawn draws close.

The stars say only a short time of night remains.”

So he said, then the two men strengthened the armour protecting their bodies. Steadfast Thrasymedes gave son of Tydeus a fine two-edged sword, for his own weapon was back by the ships, and put on his friend’s head what the young soldiers called a dog’s-skin, a tightly-fitting helmet without horsehair plume, a common sight on the battlefield. Meriones, meanwhile, gave Odysseus a bow and quiver of arrows; also a sword; and the dog’s-skin helmet he put on his head was actually made of ox-hide, and was reinforced with leather straps that set the cap tight, and it bristled with a thick-set outer covering of teeth from a ferocious wild boar, a very artful piece of work, and the inside was provided with a padded lining of felt. This was the very dog’s-skin that Autolycus stole out of Eleon, after he’d slipped craftily into the house of Amyntor, son of Ormenus, a stronghold men had called impregnable. He won the admiration of sneaky Hermes from this; then he gave the cap to Amphidamas of Cythem, who took it to Skandeia on Kythira, Aphrodite’s oldest island sanctuary. Amphidamas gave the cap to Molos, brother of Idomeneus, as a house-gift, who himself passed it on to his own son Meriones

to wear in the war; so now, the very cap once handled by Autolycus, Odysseus' grandfather, now protected the head of Odysseus.

So when the two men were secure in their body armour they went their way, and left the other leaders behind. And Athena goddess of strength and victory sent a bird up beside them, a black-crowned night heron drifting close by; and though the dark obscured it from their eyes, the men heard its cry in their minds, a gentle melody; and Odysseus rejoiced at the omen, and prayed to Athena, Deviser of Plans :

*"Hear me, child of Zeus, if you care to,  
you who have ever stood by me, who does  
not move unseen by you when advancing  
on the enemy. Be my friend one more time,  
Athena, and at your most outstanding,  
in a way as never before, and grant  
that we two return to glorious fame  
to the ships, with a tale to tell of  
much hurt done on unsuspecting Trojans."*

And Diomedes, too, prayed in silence, saying :

*"Hear me, child of Zeus, goddess Unwearied.  
Be with me now as you went with δῖος  
Tydeus, into Thebe, that time he went  
as ambassador, then conveyed a kind  
word to the Cadmeians and left them  
as a just slaughterer of many men.  
You, then, were there with him when he cut down*

*the killers lying in wait in the reeds.*  
*You helped devise for him memorably*  
*warlike deeds. Goddess, choose to stand with me*  
*now, and protect me; and if I return*  
*I'll gift you a heifer, a yearling*  
*yet innocent of the yoke, a life lived*  
*in freedom, whom no man has subjected.*  
*I promise to pour over her broad brow*  
*and horns a sprinkling of gold, and give her*  
*to you."*

Thus the two warriors prayed, and goddess Athena heard them,  
 the daughter of Zeus. Off they went, the two men moving like lions  
 in the black night, forging a path through the slaughter on the plain,  
 picking their way past the corpses, the wrack of arms and armour;  
 and stepping over puddles of dark blood.

Within the walls of Troy, godlike Hector was likewise awake.  
 He had summoned round him all the best Trojans, leaders  
 and ministers and warriors; and when the assembly  
 was called to order, he developed a cunning plan, saying :

"Who among us is eager for dangerous work? And payment  
 proper to the job? For my word is certain that the reward  
 will be great. A chariot and two noble horses are his,  
 the very best now standing by the ships of the Achaeans,  
 to whoever dares go now by those ships (and thereby win glory)  
 and spy out if they're guarded with vigilance, as usual;  
 or, now that we have them on the run, our enemy plans flight.  
 Weary from our heavy labours, perhaps their guard is down,  
 and our enemy is open to swift attack, and their ships



to our deadly fire.”

So spoke Hector, and was answered with silence.

Finally a Trojan by the name of Dolon spoke,  
the son of most faithful minister Eumedes,  
and the one brother in a family of five  
sisters; who was a rich man, in gold and bronze both,  
but was accounted unpleasant in appearance;  
yet quick-footed. Dolon, then, said to the Trojans  
and to Hector :

“I’ll go to their open ships and see what’s what.  
Come now! Raise the staff of office, and swear before  
all that you will give me the horses and chariot  
of Achilles himself. Who has ever seen a chariot  
so fine with bronze? For that I will outrun your expectations.  
I’ll go straight through the camp to Agamemnon’s ship.  
There, no doubt, an assembly is debating whether  
to flee, or fight.”

So spoke Dolon, and Hector lifted the staff, and swore to him,  
saying :

“Let Zeus hear me, who decides everything,  
that no other man but yourself shall touch  
those horses. I say only you among us  
shall have an everlasting fame in them.”

Thus Hector swore an oath ultimately untrue, but no man  
living can know the mind of God. So his idle words excited

Dolon, who set his curved bow on his shoulders, and flung a wolf skin round him; and on his head he fitted a cap of weasel hide. Then he took his spear and went forth from the army toward the enemy ships. But Hector's oath went amiss in several ways; including the fact that Dolon would never come back from those ships to bring word to him. For now, however, Dolon ran across the plain with the wide army of men and horses behind him.

Odysseus and Diomedes, meanwhile, were also crossing the plain, moving in Dolon's direction. Odysseus went still, and held Diomedes back, whispering in his ear :

"Diomedes, here comes someone from the Trojans.  
Perhaps a spy. Or a scavenger to strip the dead bodies.  
Let him pass us. Then we'll rush him and take him. We do it fast,  
and quietly. But if the man outruns us, you pursue him.  
Trap him in with your spear; we're not letting him get back."

So said Odysseus. Then the men moved from the path, and lay down among the dead. And the Trojan ran past, oblivious of them. They waited for him to reach the span of a day's furrow for a mule—and mules pull the solid plough through deep soil faster than oxen—then they bolted after him, and he heard their footsteps and turned round. And in his heart of hearts he hoped friends from the city were coming to bring him back on Hector's orders; but it was plain they were enemies and only a spear-fly away or less, so he pushed his legs to his fastest, and straightaway they took chase. As two saw-toothed dogs, acute in pursuit, stay fixed on a doe or a rabbit which runs through the woods shrieking, just so did Diomedes and destroyer of cities Odysseus chase Dolon, cutting him off from

his people and keeping hard on him. And Dolon, hearing them  
 press on him, ran toward the Achaean ships, but now for his life;  
 yet was unaware he was approaching the wide-eyed watchmen.  
 It was then that Athena gifted Diomedes with strength,  
 so that no other warrior might exult at Dolon's capture,  
 and Tydeus' son be too late. So he sprang at Dolon,  
 who saw a death-bringing spear-tip in the corner of his eye,  
 and heard Diomedes speak :

"Stop now, or I kill you."

So he spoke and let fly, and the polished spear-point passed over  
 the man's right shoulder, deliberately missing him to stick  
 fast in the dirt before him. Dolon stopped moving or he would  
 have run into it. So he turned round to face his enemies,  
 swooning with terror, stammering in place of talk, and panting,  
 and his teeth chattering in his twitchy mouth. The two men came close  
 and took his hands. And tears fell from Dolon's eyes, as he finally  
 got out :

"Let me live, and all my wealth is yours. My home is beautiful  
 to see, and in it you will have bronze and silver and iron,  
 all wondrously shaped and carved, beautiful to see. My father  
 will happily give freely of his own wealth as well, if he  
 hears his son is living, and standing far from the Argive ships."

And in answer spoke Odysseus πολύμητις :

"Don't bother with all that right now. Don't think of downhearted death  
 either. But come! and tell me truly. Why do you move this way  
 in the middle of the night, while the other men are asleep?"

Perhaps you're skulking around in the dark to strip the dead men of their armour? You've come here to mingle with the dead? Or are you a spy sent by Hector, to stake out our positions and our ships, which are not too far away. Or is something else on your mind?"

And Dolon, all his limbs shaking confusedly, answered him :

"Indeed, it is just as you say! Hector blinded me with hopes of wealth, and led me astray. He spoke of the wondrously shaped horses of the glorious son of Peleus, and his chariot. Who has ever seen a chariot so fine with bronze? He said he would give these to me, if I ran through the night air and come close to the enemy, and see if the ships remain as well-secured as before, or, now that our fortunes have changed, perhaps you're tired, and your guard is down, and open to attack."

And smiling at him spoke Odysseus πολύμητις :

"Those are considerable rewards you're after, the horses of Aeacus' son, the warlike. Did you think you could drive them? Achilles, born of an immortal mother, can control them, but no one else. Not you. Now tell me this : when you had your heart to heart with Hector, where exactly were you standing? And get comfortable, for my questions are many. I want to know where his arms and armour are, and his horses. You are going to describe for us the situation of the watchmen, and also the beds of many another Trojan. And before you're done here, we three will talk of Trojan plans. Are they happy to stay on the plain, standing not very far from our precious ships; or, satisfied with their good fortune, do they plan to return

to the city?"

And in answer spoke Dolon, son of Eumedes :

"I can tell you everything right now. Hector's at assembly with his ministers at the tomb of godlike Ilos, founder of Troy, away from the botheration of the camp. The guards you ask about, Great Achaean Hero—we have no watchmen devoted to the army far across the plain. The Trojans keep awake by their fires, and urge one another to keep his own watch; but the allies are asleep. They leave it to the Trojans to watch over everything, since it's not their wives and children living inside the city walls."

Then Odysseus asked him :

"These allies, do they sleep among the Trojans, or off on their own? Describe for me the situation."

And Dolon answered him :

"I can describe all that for you precisely. Out there by the sea are the Carians, and the Paeonians, the ones with those wondrously bent bows, and the Leleges, the Kaukones, and the mighty Pelasgi. Now there by Gate Thymbria lie the Lycians and the noble Mysians and the Phrygians who fight from chariots, and the Maeonians, arranger of all the chariots that ride the plain. But why do you ask me of all this? If you want to go down into the army of the Trojans I'll tell you right now what to do. Look over there a ways : see? Those are the Thracians. They are newly come,

so farthest off. Their king is Rhesus, son of Eioneus.

I know they live along the river Strymon. And Rhesus' horses are the most beautiful I've ever seen, white as snow, fast as the winds. And his chariot is carven and ornamented with gold and silver; and his golden armour is wondrously huge, and incredible to see. The armour he brought with him is not for mortal men, but for the gods who are immortal.

So then. Lead me to your lines, or tie me up and leave me here. Go find out for yourself that everything I've told you is truth."

Then Diomedes looked darkly at the man, and spoke, saying :

"Dolon, face it. There is no escaping here; though we value the facts you have given us. If we let you go to run free, soon you'll be running back on us, either as spy, or spearman. On the other hand, if I kill you now, you'll be no inconvenience later."

So he spoke, and Dolon made to speak in heated prayer, and raised his hands, but Diomedes swung his sword and sheared off the man's head clean at the neck. Still articulating it rolled away in the dust. Then they took the cap of weasel hide, and wolf skin, and bow, and spear : and while gathering these Odysseus prayed to Athena Bright-Eyes, distributor of the spoil, whispering :

*"Goddess of strength, I wish you well. Always  
I praise you first of all the immortals  
of Olympus. Now bring us to the beds  
of the Thracian warriors."*

Thus spoke Odysseus. He lifted the spoils and put them  
 by a tamarisk. He then broke some branches off and stuck them  
 in the bush, as clear marks for them to see when returning through  
 the black night, that was passing quick. So the two men moved swiftly,  
 skilfully stepping among the fallen armour and puddled blood,  
 and straightaway gained entry into the Thracian camp. Now  
 all the men were asleep, wearied from the day's effort. They were  
 neatly arranged in three well-ordered rows, with each warrior's  
 arms and armour beside him, and also his two horses, tied  
 with leather ropes to a chariot, each of ornate breastwork.  
 The most beautiful of all chariots shone in the centre  
 of the company. This, Odysseus saw, was the chariot  
 of King Rhesus, who was asleep beside it. Odysseus  
 indicated this to Diomedes, and whispered to him,  
 saying :

"There's the king. So let's do it. Do you want  
 to free the horses or kill all the men?  
 You do one and I'll do the other."

And before Odysseus had spoken in full,  
 Athena Bright-Eyes let out the fury  
 in Diomedes, who began killing men  
 every which way, cutting throats left and right  
 and plunging his sword into their chests;  
 and a groaning arose; and Diomedes dripped  
 red with blood, like a lion who finds flocks  
 unguarded, for the shepherd is gone, and rushes  
 upon the goats or the sheep with horror in heart;  
 so rushed Diomedes through the rows, visiting  
 death upon twelve men. Odysseus, meanwhile,

dragged away each dead man by the foot from behind,  
 and left them to one side, so that the fine horses,  
 when he led them away through the depleted ranks,  
 might not hesitate in fear, and trouble him among  
 a mess of dead bodies, for he was unknown to them.

When Tydeus' son stood by the king, he saw  
 the sleeping man gasping for breath in a nightmare  
 of some kind, but if it were an omen, the man  
 didn't read it right, for Diomedes robbed him  
 of honey-sweet life, and he became the thirteenth  
 dead man piled to the side. Odysseus then  
 freed his horses, tied their reins together, and led  
 them out and away, prodding them with the tip  
 of a bow, for he didn't think to take the whip  
 from the chariot-box, as πολύμητις never  
 fought on chariots in battle. As he moved out,  
 he whistled a sign to δῖος Diomedes.

But Diomedes lingered among the carnage,  
 considering what next horror to deliver :  
 to take the chariot, full of wondrously  
 ornamented arms and armour, rolling it out  
 by the pole, or lifting it up over his head  
 and walking out; or should he add to the death-pile  
 of Thracians? While he wondered all this, Athena  
 came near and spoke to δῖος Diomedes, saying :

"Think of returning to the ships now, son of great-hearted Tydeus.  
 If some other god alerts the Trojans, you'll be leaving in a hurry."



Thus spoke goddess Athena; and Diomedes knew the sound  
 of her voice, so he quickly untied the rest of the horses,  
 even as he heard the enemy starting to come awake;  
 then mounted one, and Odysseus leapt onto another;  
 and all galloped swiftly back to the ships of the Achaeans.

And it would be as Athena had predicted to her friend :  
 for far-shooting Apollo was in no way inattentive  
 to all this destruction by the Argives. He burned with anger  
 to see Athena collaborating with Diomedes.  
 So he went down into the Trojan multitude, and mingled  
 with the army, and prodded awake Thracian minister  
 Hippocoön, a noble relation of the now-dead king.

This man opened his eyes on the spot now bereft of the fine  
 horses of the king. And when he jumped out of bed he saw worse :  
 he discovered himself standing in grisly carnage, and heard  
 painful noises of men struggling in death. Then he wailed  
 aloud, and cried out the name of his excellent king and friend.  
 And the Trojans heard his cry, and confusion indescribable  
 broke out as one and another rushed this way and that. Many  
 came to gaze on the memorably awful work, done by men  
 now here, now gone, and now already returning to their ships.

Those two now came to the place on the plain where the dead body  
 of Hector's spy lay without its head. Odysseus restrained  
 the fast-galloping horses, and bloodstained Diomedes jumped  
 to the ground and recovered the spoils still dripping with gore  
 that had leaked from the opened neck. Then he remounted his horse  
 and the pair rushed on, flying toward their ships, and soon they were there.  
 And Nestor was the first to remark on the sound of horses

approaching, and spoke out for all to hear :

“My good men, am I wrong, or is the sound of fast-galloping horses in the air, and coming our way? Have Odysseus and Diomedes brought terror to the Trojans already? And have they sent us a prize of what sounds like many horses? Oh, but for a fear at heart I cannot keep quiet : I fear these bravest of Argives suffered something terrible over there.”

But even as he spoke his words were drowned out by the cheering of men, as the two warriors emerged into sight, with white horses galloping out of the night with them. Odysseus and Diomedes jumped down to earth, and the men around them embraced their shoulders kindly, and welcomed them in great joy, and many victorious words.

And Nestor spoke, for all to hear :

“Do tell me, o much-praised Odysseus, great glory of our people, how in the world did two men take all of these horses? Did you two warriors go down into the enemy lines? Truthfully, now—were they gifts of a god? These are wondrous to see; they glow like sunbeams! I’ve had many dealings with Trojans—no one sees me sitting by the ships, as any aged man might prefer to do, but still I fight, and have seen much : horses like these, however—I’ve never imagined such a sight. Come now and tell us true : they were gifts of a god. You met one on the way. Everyone knows the daughter of Zeus cloud-gatherer loves you both, the virgin goddess herself, Athena Bright-Eyes.”

And Odysseus πολύμητις answered him :

“Nestor, son of Neleus, great glory of our people, a god  
*could* have given us these horses, as gods can do as they please.  
But these horses are fresh from Thrace, and Diomedes killed  
their king and twelve of his men, and we took these for our trouble;  
and another man lies dead on the plain, a spy that Hector  
sent out to scout our plans.”

So spoke Odysseus, then laughingly drove the horses in  
to the trench then out the other side, and all the Achaeans  
joyfully went with him. When they arrived at the well-composed  
tent of the son of Tydeus, they stalled the white horses in  
with Diomedes’ own, which were standing there, eating sweet corn.  
Odysseus, meanwhile, placed the gory spoils of Dolon  
on the stern of his ship, preparatory to an offering  
to Athena goddess. Then the two men walked into the sea  
and washed away the sweat and the blood from their legs and the back  
of their necks and all the rest of them. When the waves of the sea  
had washed away the sweat and the blood from their skin, and their hearts  
were relaxed, they next stepped into bathtubs of fresh water,  
and were bathed. Then, when the two were bathed, and glimmering with rich  
oil all over their skin, they sat down to an early breakfast,  
where first they drew from the full mixing-bowl and poured the honey-  
sweet wine to Athena.

End of Book X

## Book XI

Dawn rose from the side of her lover Tithonus, the hapless immortal-but-ageing Tithonus, to spread light across sky and earth for hapless immortals and mortals alike. And Zeus released Chaos onto the Achaean ships, apocalyptic horror, her hands holding an omen of war, a grey rainbow, whose end touched down by Odysseus' black wide-bellied ship, where she stood, there at the central point, with Ajax at one end, and Achilles at the other, and she opened her mouth wide, the terrible goddess, and shrieked out her cry at a high pitch that cut the heart of each Achaean warrior, and filled each with unspeakable strength and an implacable will to wage war and to fight. And so it was that war became sweeter to these men than any hope of their oar-waving ships sailing home.

And incorporated in her cry was Agamemnon's shout to the Argives to arm themselves for combat, heavy combat. And standing there for all to see the commander of the army got into his glittering bronze armour. First he fixed his leg-plates into place with clasps : as much artwork as armour, they were finished with silver ankle-guards. Next he put about his chest a breast-plate given by his friend Cinyras as a guest-gift. When far away in Island Cyprus he heard the rumour of the great expedition of Achaean ships readying for Troy, he thereafter gave him the breast-plate, as a token of honour and of good hope. Staring into this piece of body armour could make hostile eyes lose focus, so intricate it was, complicatedly so, and vivid with aggressive colour. A stripe pattern of alternating quality and colour ran horizontally up and down: ten bands of lapis lazuli,

twelve of gold, and twenty of tin. And there were several widths to these bands, intermixed as an oscillation to wobble one's eyesight. And cutting across the stripe pattern vertically were many snakes, three inlaid to the left, and three on the right, with their many forked tongues lashing out at his neck, and bodies sinuous as the rainbows that Zeus summons to glow among the clouds as an omen to mortal men. And he flung his sword round his shoulders, his weapon studded with gold that threw back sunlight sharp enough to blind an enemy long enough to die. But for now the sword was sheathed in a silver scabbard that hung down from golden chains. And he took up his protective shield, his brave friend in battle; and to gaze into it was to travel in to concentric circles leading to two eyes of rubies that glowed deadly-red in sunlight. These were the eyes of the grim-faced Gorgon, a horrifying sight surrounded by ten bronze rings radiating outward and expanding along the way, and in among them were twenty rings of tin, the rare material of tin, and one ring of blue lazuli. This last encompassed that face that chills, and dispirits, and demoralizes, and freezes : the Gorgon, glaring with her glowing red eyes. Staring into the shield inspired thoughts of unruly terror and panic. The shield was aggression, the shield was protection, the shield was singularity, the shield was art—even its handle was ornate and terrifying, both : made of solid silver, it was inlaid with a vile serpent of lapis lazuli which had three heads growing out from one neck, one throat. The three heads coiled each round the others in an hypnotic pattern, and the feel of it under the fingers gave the hand strength. And on his head he fixed his fearsome helmet, furnished with four bosses, each as long as a wild boar's tusk, to deflect crushing blows. And at the apex aspired a plume of horsehair that shuddered

with unnerving colour. And he took two long death-bringing spears, their sharp tips of bronze sending a glimmer up into heaven, where Athena and Hera sat, peering down. So the two roused thunder, to honour the king of golden Mycenae.

The heavily-armed foot-soldiers of the Achaean army marched forward up to the trench; then went down inside, and began moving through the thicket of spikes stuck upright there. The drivers of the chariots, meanwhile, brought their horses to the edge of the trench and lined up, and had to restrain their horses' desire to bolt. There the Achaean leaders waited. And sounds came up from down within the trench that joined as one towering cry while Dawn spread her light; for Zeus up in Heaven held out his arms wide, and a rain of blood fell through his fingers, and spilled down the sky and showered the warriors, who cried out in confusion in their cramped space, and the clamour made the horses shake and snort. So the Olympian sky dripped blood because Zeus had a point to make : the heads of many men would be tossed into Hades today, and all that excellence lost.

And, ahead of them, the Trojan army, man by man, appeared upon the rising ground of the Scamander plain. They, bristling with sharpest weaponry, looked down on their god-cursed enemy, eager to kill them all. At the front of their lines stood Hector, fiercest Trojan warrior; and with him stood wild Polydamas; and most honoured Aeneas, whom the people looked to as a god. Also standing tall in front were the three sons of Antenor, oldest friend and wisest counsellor to Priam, king of Troy : his sons were Polybus, whom all men knew his hands alone tore men apart limb from limb; and Agenor, whose very name itself derived from the Greek word for 'fight' (ἀγών), also for the agony

and anguish that confuses one's mind, and *antagonism* simply put; and the third son was young Acamas, beautiful as an immortal. So δῖος Hector stood before his army, his massive shield raised before him, a perfectly balanced contrivance, and a perfect circle. Just as the clouds drift aside to reveal a star of ill-omen terribly glittering, then come to overshadow it again, so Hector appeared and re-appeared, first here, then there, giving commands to his men among the lines. So from afar the Trojan army looked to crackle with lightning whenever the bronze-coated Hector showed himself, for the sunlight flashed from his armour like the lightning of Zeus Orderer.

And just as two reapers in thriving competition cut twin swathes through the wheat or barley of a rich man's field, and the handfuls cut by the sickle fall fast : just so did the Trojans and Achaeans cut into each other with vigour, and in the havoc of blood no one thought to think of flight, for flight meant final obliteration; so they charged, and fought like wolves, and the brawl took many heads on both sides. And Chaos Goddess Iris laughed, looking on all the colours of combat, particularly the red blood flowing; and laughed at the sound of many groans. Chaos was the only god there. All the other gods were away from the war, resting at ease, free from care in their own space, each in a ravine of deep Olympus. They pointed to Zeus as the cause of all the noise, dropping all the blame on the Storm-Cloud God, portraying themselves as innocents in the origins of the blood-bath, now that the Trojans were close to victory. How laughable, the so-called glory of mortals 'victorious'! Zeus Orderer, however, didn't give a flying fuck what the other ones

said or thought. He stayed away from everyone, all their hateful rubbish; and sat at ease in his majesty, and looked down on the city of Troy and the well-built Achaean ships, on the bronze strobing across the plain like little lightning specks; and Zeus the God of Time observed both the living and the dead.

So long as the burning sun rose ever higher, light intensified on the plain, and the hour reached nine, then ten in the morning; so long as the spears and arrows passing each other in air hit their marks, so long did the men keep falling; but at that hour, just past ten, when a woodman, his arms wearied with work after toppling many tall trees, has had enough of swinging the axe, and prepares a meal in his mountain vale spot, and desire for sweet food takes hold of his heart : just then the Danaans broke through the enemy lines of battle, and called to their fellow soldiers to follow them in. And Agamemnon went forward, hacking his way through the enemy with the foremost of his men, and came to stand before Bienor, Trojan warrior and leader. Agamemnon reached out and tore the man off his chariot-board, and by the time he hit the ground he was dead. Then he faced the dead man's charioteer, the soon-to-be-dead Oïleus, who jumped down from the chariot with spear in hand; and he chose to run at Agamemnon king of men, whose own spear went straight through the Trojan's helmet right into his soft brain, and the man's head became a mishmash of shattered skull and scrambled brains, there inside his helmet of bronze. So that was that for that man. And Agamemnon tore off their armour and flung it aside then went further and ripped off their tunics, exposing their bare bodies to the air as a one last bitter humiliation. So Agamemnon stepped over their bodies, then stripped Isos and Antiphos of their lives, two of King Priam's sons, the one



illegitimate and the other a child of wedlock,  
 the two of them occupying one chariot : the bastard  
 kept to the board and held the reins, but excellent Antiphos  
 had leapt to earth to face army commander Agamemnon,  
 who knew these two Trojans. Once upon a time δῖος Achilles  
 had tied them both up hand-and-foot with willow shoots, when he crept  
 up on them while they herded their sheep through the foothills of Ida,  
 and then paraded the pair alongside the Achaean ships,  
 after carrying them all the way from Ida; but he set  
 them free after a ransom was paid. But now Agamemnon  
 took their freedom : he ran a spear into the chest of Isos  
 then yanked it back out, and before hapless Antiphos knew it,  
 Agamemnon's sword penetrated his ear, which flung him  
 back out of the chariot and into the dust. Then the victor  
 rapidly stripped off their armour and tossed it aside as if  
 it were filth. As a lion easily crunches up the young  
 ones of a swift deer, when he takes them with his powerful jaws  
 and haplessly breaks their necks, and robs them of their lives, when just  
 before they'd been asleep in bed : and the mother hears it all  
 because by chance she had come by her lair, but cannot rescue  
 her children, and on herself comes a terrible quivering  
 and she can do nothing but run through the crackling underbrush  
 and the woods, hurrying quick as she can, and sweating, and hears  
 the coming of the terrible creature behind her : so now  
 the Trojans were in panic flight from the Argives.

Then he took on Peisander and Hippolochus, two unyielding  
 warriors who would soon yield to king of men Agamemnon.  
 They were the sons of wise Antimachus, and for their pains in  
 combat they hoped to get gifts of gold, splendid gifts, from Paris,  
 so chafed at Helen being returned to 'bland' Menelaus.

Master of men Agamemnon took them both on together,  
 for they stood together in one chariot, and their four arms  
 were all mixed-up and panic-stricken after their reins had slipped  
 from their hands, and their two horses were galloping wildly.  
 So he charged at them through the commotion like a lion, the son  
 of Atreus, and the two helpless ones called to him, and their words  
 were to Agamemnon as the bleating of sheep as they said :

“Take us alive, son of Atreus, and take into your hands a  
 wondrous ransom! Our father Antimachus has many treasures  
 inside his palace, beautiful bronze and gold and iron objects,  
 and immense wealth is yours if you bring us captive to your ships!”

So with weeping and wailing the two heroes spoke to the king,  
 but cruel was his reply :

“You call yourselves the sons of ‘wise’ Antimachus?  
 Not the Antimachus who unwisely tried to kill my brother?  
 And strong Odysseus besides? When they came to deliver  
 a message from the Achaeans, and nothing more? *This now is  
 the something more*—you get to suffer for your father’s insult.”

So Agamemnon reached out and tore Peisander from the chariot  
 and forced him heavily onto the ground, put his foot on his neck,  
 and speared him through the heart. And Hippolochus sprung down  
 from the board, and when he hit the ground Agamemnon sheared off  
 both his arms, then severed his head and knocked it away, so it  
 rolled like a round stone through the jostling bodies of warriors  
 fighting. And Agamemnon followed it deep into the turbulence  
 of confused Trojan battlelines breaking down, charging on the

enemy along with his well-armoured Achaeans. Around  
 him his foot-forces carved up the Trojans fleeing in blind panic,  
 while the Trojan charioteers were being likewise routed  
 by the Argive drivers; and from under everything, the feet  
 and the hooves and the wheels, arose the dust of the plain,  
 as if the plain entire exhaled one tremendous sigh  
 of dust. And from inside the cloud came the voice of ruler, lord,  
 and master Agamemnon, slaughterer of men, calling out  
 for his Argives to follow. As when fire falls upon thick  
 woodlands and is whirled by winds every which way and spreads out  
 its destruction wide, and whole thickets of trees—root and branch—fall  
 under the rush of flame : just so under Agamemnon fell  
 many enemy warriors; and many fast-flowing horses  
 pulled empty chariots rattling along, for their charioteers  
 lay dead on the earth, sweeter now to vultures than to wives.

Elsewhere in the confusion of arrows and spears and spreading dust  
 cloud, in among the slaughter and the blood and the horrible  
 cold-hearted noise of carnage, Hector hacked his way forward through  
 the mess, and Zeus saw him; but not yet did he visit δῖος  
 Hector. Instead, he watched the son of Atreus call fiercely  
 to his men to follow him after the best of the Trojans.

The Achaean army struggled past the ancient tomb of Ilos,  
 its stone discoloured and crumbling now, as they pushed forward  
 across the plain, striving to take the city; and all the while  
 Agamemnon kept up his frenzied screaming, harsh as a bird  
 of prey; and his all-dominating hands and head and body  
 were drenched in gore. So the Argive warriors reached the Scaean  
 gate, and all the city shuddered terrified inside. But there  
 by the oak tree the Achaeans stopped, and waited for the rest

of their army to catch up to them. So the Trojans stopped, too; and both took a breath. But back on the plain Death still prevailed as Trojans fled in panic, like cattle scattering from a lion coming in the dead of night : all have spread wide over the field, but one has been chosen, and it comes up quick : her neck is caught in mighty teeth and crushed, and death pulls her into its depths. Then the lion laps up the blood and gulps down the entrails.

Just so did master of men Agamemnon rush back to battle; just so did master of men Agamemnon slaughter like cattle all Trojans before him, rushing on them and cutting down from behind all those running from him. Indeed, they fled in terror. And fell on their faces, or on their backs, when Agamemnon thrust his spear this way or that in a rage to make the head swim : and he bathed exultant in torrents of blood. Then he decided to storm the city and bring down the walls, so Agamemnon turned back : then it was that Zeus, father of gods and men, heavily sighed, there where he sat on the summit of Ida, among its peaks spilling with spring-water; and in his hands he held lightning. He urged golden-winged Iris to convey a message with haste :

“Quickly now, my Iris wind-walker, scoot down and go among them and deliver a thought to Hector :

For as long as Hector sees Agamemnon raving along, slashing through enemy lines, leading his men; for just that long let Hector hold back, and command his warriors to scuffle with the enemy in front of him, slicing each other up in awful combat.

But when Hector sees Agamemnon wounded by spear or arrow,

and jumps onto his chariot to flee, just then will Hector advance with strength that I shall give him, to mangle and kill all the way across the plain back to the Achaean ships.

By this time, all this to-and-froing up and down the plain will have reached the hour of dusk, and Helios will go down under the earth to do what he likes in the dark, and both armies will rest from all this cockeyed coming and going. This is my word. Go now, dear Iris, and deliver this message to Hector."

Thus spoke Zeus, and Iris heard and obeyed. She stepped down the air to come beside war-wise Hector standing in his shining chariot, and the cloud-walking Iris whispered in the warrior's ear :

"Hector, Priam's son, sharp as Zeus in thought, Zeus indeed has sent me here to deliver this message : hold back until you see a wounded Agamemnon mounting his chariot. Just then, advance back across the plain to the precious Achaean ships, with strength that Zeus shall grant you, until the sun goes down."

So she spoke, then stepped away, the quick-footed Iris; and Hector jumped to the ground, making his armour rattle round him; and holding two lethal spears he went every which way through his army, rousing them to fight, rousing the horrible clamour of war. So his men turned round and faced the Achaeans with their backs to the Scaean gate, forming close ranks, ready to defend their city to the last.

And Agamemnon came on across the distance between the lines of the two armies, ready to fight in front of everyone.

Speak now, Muses, who live on Olympus, and give me

who it was who first came forward to face Agamemnon.

Was it a Trojan? Or a courageous warrior ally?

It was Iphidamas, son of Antenor, well-built and brave,  
 who was raised among the rich soil of Thrace, the fertile  
 spot of many flocks. His mother was beautiful-cheeked Theano,  
 but from a young age he was raised by his grandfather Cisseus,  
 his mother's father, and lived in his house, and grew to manhood,  
 ready to enjoy his full measure of life. Cisseus, however,  
 desired him to stay, and offered him his second daughter;  
 so Iphidamas married his maternal aunt, his mother's sister.  
 But he left the bridal chamber soon after, joining in with  
 the defence of the rise of the Achaeans, with twelve black ships  
 with him. These ships were now propped up at Percote,  
 for practical Iphidamas presumed to keep his ships safe,  
 and had come on foot to Ilium. But now he stood before  
 Agamemnon, king of men, dense with the blood of perverse  
 Atreus. And so they came up to one another, and the king  
 of men missed : his spear was knocked away by Iphidamas,  
 who slipped close, feinting with his own spear, then, aiming for a spot  
 under the breast-plate, he felt his dagger prick Agamemnon,  
 and Iphidamas leaned into the thrust with all of his weight,  
 his life depending on the strength of his hand : but he was un-  
 able to pierce through the warrior's belt—the dagger snapped in two  
 against the eye-blinding solid-silver guard like weak black lead.  
 Meanwhile Iphidamas had his spear torn from his fingers :  
 Agamemnon, moving swiftly as a lion in a frenzy,  
 flung the spear aside, and Iphidamas felt a sword drive in  
 to his throat, and all his breath ran out of him. Agamemnon  
 put him to sleep forever. Miserable youth!—leaving his  
 wife's bed cold to come here to support his homeland,

the wife whom he had enjoyed for one night only  
 as husband of the house, and to whom he had given  
 much : first a hundred head of cattle; then promised  
 her a thousand head of goats and sheep together,  
 once he got to work and built his fortune : but Agamemnon  
 took his hopes away. Moreover he stripped the dead man  
 of his armour, which he tossed aside, then went his way  
 back toward the army of the Achaeans.

But Antenor had many sons fighting there at Troy who were  
 distinguished as mighty warriors. Coön was one of his  
 sons, and when he saw his brother fall, then tears spilled from his eyes.  
 Now Coön was mighty in trickery, and with spear in hand  
 he snuck up unseen on Agamemnon, keeping to one side  
 of the king's eyeline. Coön thrust his lethal spear at δῖος  
 Agamemnon, who saw its tip sparkling in the corner  
 of his eye and turned to look, but it was too late : the bright bronze  
 stabbed his arm under his elbow and ran in, and the sharp tip  
 broke through the other side. Coön then tore out the hateful spear,  
 and blood streamed out from both ends of δῖος Agamemnon's wound.

But Agamemnon barely felt the wound penetrate his rage,  
 and fought on, his smooth wooden spear in hand, and sprang at Coön.  
 This hapless man was reaching out to drag his brother's body,  
 dead son of Antenor, off the field of battle, all the while  
 screaming for the Trojan warriors to rise up, but then he  
 felt Agamemnon's indomitable spear pass straight through him,  
 and all his body went weak : so the one dead brother fell on  
 to the other. Agamemnon then came near and cut his head  
 off over Iphidamas' body. Thus did these two sons  
 of Antenor come to meet the king of men, Agamemnon,

who brought them to the end of their full measure of life;  
and together they entered the house of Hades.

And Agamemnon ranged along the Trojan lines, looking for  
a chance to fight, but the men shied away from him,  
and he'd raise his spear first at one, then at another, then dismiss  
each with a sneer and stalk on, letting them live among the spears  
and swords and sharp stones slinging though the airborne dust.  
Agamemnon fought while the blood spilled from his wound; but by  
the time the blood had clotted at both ends of his arm, then pain  
overawed raging Atreus' son. Just as women in labour  
writhe in the appalling pains that the Eileithyiai send,  
the goddesses of childbirth, the daughters of Queen Hera  
that dispense bitter birth-pangs : just so were the pains running through  
Agamemnon. He went swiftly up onto his chariot  
and commanded his driver to ride to the ships; for to raise  
his killing arm brought pain terrible to bear, and exhausting.

So he screamed out in rage; then shouted at his men :

"Argives! Leaders and ministers! Zeus takes me away!  
But we fight on! Do not let them get to the ships!"

Thus spoke Agamemnon, and his driver cracked the whip  
at the horses and they launched forward eager to fly,  
their manes flowing in the air, and the foam from their jaws  
spattering their breasts; and the dust rising up from the plain  
stained their bellies as they brought the king out and away.

When Hector saw Agamemnon go out of the cloud of dust,  
he called aloud to his men, shouting out :



“All Trojans! Lycians! Dardanians! Be men  
 now! Think of strength and courage! and kill them all now!  
 Their best man is gone! Zeus promises us a great victory!  
 Drive your horses right at them, so we may have our victory!”

So he spoke, and encouraged battle-rage and an appetite  
 for blood in each man. As when a hunter sets salivating  
 dogs after a wild boar or lion, so man-destroying  
 Hector, friend to Ἄρης, set his colossally enraged army  
 onto the Argives. He then himself ran forward through the ranks  
 till he reached the front lines, then leapt into combat as a storm  
 rushes in, bringing convulsions to the violet sea.

Tell us how many lives Hector stripped from the earth.  
 Who was first to die, who was last? when Zeus granted  
 Hector glory, for awhile. First killed was Asaeos, then  
 Autonoös, καὶ Opites, καὶ Dolops, son of Clytius,  
 καὶ Opheltios, τε Agelaos, τε Oros τ’ Hipponoös μενε-  
 χάρμης, “who stood his ground, high on war”. These Danaan leaders  
 he brought down, then kicked their bodies away; and leapt headlong in  
 to the indiscriminate crowd to kill more, anyone. Just as  
 the West Wind knocks aside the clouds riding the brightening South  
 Wind, hammering them with a tempest of wind and heavy rain,  
 and roils the sea into swollen waves rolling along, and  
 sea-spray smashes into the air amid the whistling of the  
 far-roving winds : just as stormy was the rage of Hector stalking  
 the plain; and many Argive heads were brought to earth.

Thus, the Achaeans were tipped toward total obliteration;  
 and that would have been that, for all of them, and all their precious

ships burnt to ash, had not Odysseus come up alongside  
the son of Tydeus, to say :

“Diomedes, why is this happening to us? Our strength is  
gone! Fuck it. We’ll stand together. We’re not dying like cowards  
when that Ἄρης - loving Hector comes to pulverize our ships.”

And Diomedes answered him :

“I’m with you. We’ll have our pleasure for a short time at least,  
since all-glorious Zeus prefers to give them the victory.”

And as he spoke he pushed Thymbraeus out of his chariot;  
and when he hit the ground he felt Diomedes’ spear sink  
deep into his left breast. And Odysseus killed his servant,  
Molon. They left this royal pair to lie by their ornamented  
chariot, since now they were forever retired from combat;  
then charged deeper into the turbulence of warriors, adding  
to the confusion : as when two wild boars fall viciously  
on hunting dogs : just so did the godlike pair cut their way  
through many a Trojan, leaving many severed body parts  
in their wake; though the Argive army itself kept retreating  
further back toward their ships, under Hector’s relentless attack.

At any rate Odysseus and Diomedes leapt on  
to an enemy chariot and grappled with its two men,  
the two sons of Merops of Percote, celebrated as  
well-skilled in the art of prophecy. This man had not allowed  
his sons to march into man-consuming war; but they would not  
hear him, because the goddesses of death were leading them on;  
and now the black goddesses had their triumph : for Diomedes

stole their spirit and breath away, and their ostentatious armour.  
 Odysseus, meanwhile, had leapt off to strike down two men  
 of his own : Hippodamus καὶ Hypeirochus.

And so it was that at this time Zeus Orderer laid out evenly  
 the odds of victory, as he watched from on high, atop Ida :  
 where long ago two wood nymphs Ida and Adrasteia raised  
 him when an infant, among the peaks and vales of the sacred  
 mountain range. Later, to honour them, he rewarded them thrones  
 in the night air, where they glimmer eternally as constellations.  
 But the duration of the passage from infant to god was  
 arduous at best; so the duration of the passage from  
 infant to old man must be worse to experience, and it is.  
 For instance, just now Zeus watched these men killing one another.

He saw Agastrophus struck by the spear of Diomedes,  
 leaving a wound gushing blood from his hip; and far-away Zeus  
 heard the scrape of bronze on bone. But the wounded warrior had  
 nowhere to flee, for he had kept his horses far from the fight,  
 thinking himself a practical man. So he had to flee on foot,  
 and was dead before long. And the servant minding his horses  
 outside the battle cloud stood there patiently with the horses,  
 who would never see their master again. But Hector caught sight  
 of both Tydeus' son and Odysseus, and charged at them  
 with a shrieking of awful war, and with him came the front line  
 of the Trojan battle-array. Diomedes saw Hector  
 coming, and leaned in close to Odysseus to say :

“Here he comes. We'll stand and take him together. What do you think?”

And Odysseus replied :

“Okay.”

So he spoke, while Diomedes aimed his long spear and threw it, and hit the mark. Hector was hit on the helmet, but its bronze deflected the shot, which did not pierce bare skin, for his helmet was a wondrous device of three layers, a gift from Apollo.

So the spear bounced off, but the blow made Hector stagger, and he saw stars, and went down to one knee amid the jostling throng of warriors clashing, and stayed there, with his strong hand touching the earth; and, as he struggled to compose himself, night began to seep into his eyes. Meanwhile Diomedes charged forward, intent on finishing him off, shoving warriors this way and that out of his way heading to Hector. But by the time he reached where his spear had hit, Hector was gone. He had revived, found his chariot, and was now riding out of the dust cloud even as Diomedes stood dumbfounded at the empty space. And so this time Hector leader of Trojans escaped black death.

And Diomedes shouted out into the air :

“Run, dog, or I’ll kick you again! Run to Apollo  
and pray, because without him you’d be dead!  
But he’s not the only god in the sky!  
When you see me again I will kill you!  
We too have gods who stand with us!  
Now I’ll kill your men left and right!”

Thus Diomedes, while stripping the armour off the ghastly corpse of Agastrophus, once celebrated as a war-god, but now just humanly dead. All this was happening hard-by

the tomb of Ilos, the memorial built of mortal hands  
 long ago in obsolete times, and now crumbling piece by  
 piece; but once Ilos was a leader of the people and Troy.  
 Now just there stood Alexandros, husband to lovely Helen,  
 lurking with his bow; and while Diomedes was wasting  
 time and energy tearing the glimmering corselet off  
 his victim, to pile it onto the shield already torn  
 off the shoulder, and also the heavy helmet, just then  
 did Alexandros string an arrow, and pull it back to his chin;  
 and he aimed it at Diomedes, and then he let it fly;  
 and it was no idle shot that sprang from his hands. Diomedes  
 felt the arrow pass though his foot and break out the other side,  
 his right foot; and he saw the goddamn arrow stick itself in  
 the dirt before him, and the blood began to flow from his wound.  
 And Paris jumped into the air with a sweet laugh; and from his  
 ambush he shouted big talk for the Argive hero to hear :

“Hit! That was no idle shot I let fly!  
 If only I’d struck you in the belly  
 and taken your life!—So might the Trojans  
 have a rest from killing, who fear you as  
 lions fear a goat!”

And mighty Diomedes replied, feeling no fear as he  
 started out ever-so-slowly toward Paris, step by step :

“You talk big when standing far off, you filthy woman-fucker.  
 Come down here and try me face to face; then your bow would be use-  
 less, and your arrows good for nothing but sticking up your ass.  
 As vain of your curling crown of hair as a girl, so you boast  
 over a scratch! This love-tap you gave me makes me laugh, you im-

becile. Did it fly from a woman? or an idiot child?

Weak is the shot sent by a weakling, a cowardly nothing  
of a man.”

And as he spoke he moved ever closer to Paris, saying :

“Come to me now, warrior, and my lightest touch will break you.  
Then you can take your place among the dead. Then your lovely wife  
can tear her cheeks in grief, and your children grow up fatherless,  
while you rot where you lie. Then more birds will whirl around you  
than women; and they will chew all your vaunted beauty away.”

Thus spoke angry Diomedes, but before he reached Paris,  
Odysseus had followed the trail of blood to his friend,  
and held him back. And Diomedes understood, and sat down  
on the earth to assess his inconvenient wound, and scorching  
pain rushed through the passages of his body. So Odysseus  
took up where Diomedes left off, while Diomedes  
jumped up onto a chariot and commanded the driver  
to get them the hell out of there, and head for the ships. And all  
the while he stood furious that he had to leave the fight.

Now Odysseus stood alone, holding his spear, on the earth  
left bare by the Achaeans retreating in their panic flight.

Then with a deep sigh he spoke out to himself, saying :

“ὦ μοι ! What the hell do I do now? The whole goddamn army  
is running away in fear. It’s a cold thing to die alone.

Zeus, why have you done this? But why am I talking to myself?

So be it. Let me find the best and bravest there is of them.

And he better stand strong, or I'm sending him straight to hell."

While he raced through that in mind and heart, the Trojans came up to surround him, their shields and spears raised, seemingly cutting off all hope of escape, and promising him a great misery.

And just as dogs and youths in the prime of their strength chase a boar, closing in from two sides, and he races through the deep thickets, whetting his lower tusk with his upper one, sharpening it for battle, and his gnashing jaws are a warning; yet still they come on strong, however fearful he looks; even so the Trojans pressed in round Odysseus, who had no choice now but to fight, or die. So excellent Deïopites had his fighting arm sliced off before he knew it, then were Thoön καὶ Eunomus hacked up and their pieces all mingled together in the dirt. And Chersidamas as he attempted the heroic move of leaping from his chariot was speared through the belly while still in the air, and came down to earth already dying, and he grasped with his fingers at the plain, as he lay writhing on the ground, and when he died his fingers slowly opened to reveal the dust of the earth he'd gathered there. He left those two dead men there, then took down Charops with his long death-bringing spear. And Socus, brother to Charops, both massive men in size, ran up to bring help, and spoke out to Odysseus as he came :

"Odysseus! Well-known in thought and deed! Now neither will help you! I'm sticking this spear into you and taking your life. Then I'll own you forever."

And as he spoke he pushed his spear deep into Odysseus' shield. The lethal spear-point forced through all the layers of his cover,

heavy shield and intricately-carven breastplate and all else,  
 and headed into him to ruin the inward parts of his chest.  
 But Athena Bright-Eyes knocked it aside and the bronze tip sheared  
 off all the skin from his side instead and stuck fast there. And then  
 Odysseus, knowing he wasn't dead yet, drew back and spoke :

"Away, you sack of guts! Watch me spill them out onto the earth  
 for you; for death is here. You may have taken me out of the fight  
 for now, but I'm taking you out of life for ever. These hands  
 shall now toss you to the champion rapist of the Underworld."

And as Odysseus was speaking, Socus turned round to flee,  
 but as he made his first step, he was spun back round  
 and took Odysseus' spear straight through his heart  
 and out his back, and fell with a clatter at Odysseus' feet.

So Odysseus came to stand over Socus, planting one  
 foot on either side of the dying man, and he spoke, saying :

"Glorious Socus, son of somebody, you can't outrun death.  
 Think of it, as you breathe your last in my face : your dear parents  
 —your honourable father, your sweet-hearted mother—will not  
 bury you with respect, nor ever close your eyelids with loving  
 fingers. No, Socus, yours is a more miserable fate.  
 The birds will root around inside you, and pull out your entrails,  
 and enjoy a good dinner. (But you won't feel the wind of their wings  
 flapping around you.) I may die here with you, but my body  
 will be honoured; and, dead though I'll be, I can live with that."

Thus spoke mighty warlike Odysseus, who then yanked the spear  
 out of his body, then out of his shield. Then he saw the blood



pour from his wound, and he was furious at heart to see it.

The Trojan warriors crowding around him turned ferocious when they saw the blood flowing, and called out to each other to charge at him together at once. But somehow Odysseus eluded their grasp and then he let out a cry, he let out as much sound as a man's head can hold, and Menelaus heard, and straightaway turned to Ajax, who stood nearby, and spoke out :

“Ajax! Zeus-born champion of men! I just heard Odysseus cry out! I fear he's been caught, or at least cut off from us. Come now! We must find him! Saving him is imperative! If we lose Odysseus we may very well lose it all.”

So he spoke, rushing toward the cry, and Ajax followed close behind. They found Odysseus surrounded by Trojans. Just as jackals in the mountains gather round a horned stag hindered by a wound from an arrow sent from the string of a hunter; from him, though, the deer escapes, and runs through the woods for as long as the blood flows warm, and the legs have strength to move; but when, at last, the sharp arrow subdues the deer, then do the jackals come round and tear the raw flesh apart, and enjoy the deer-meat in a shady bower; but then God brings on a ravening lion, and the jackals scatter in haste, and he himself devours the carcass : just so did Odysseus scatter the Trojans attempting to cut him down, and forcefully held back a pitiless fate. Then the tremendous Ajax came before the Trojans, who shuddered at his size, and scattered yet further away in all directions, leaving Odysseus to take a breath. Ajax's famous shield was thick as a wall, and enemy warriors often had second thoughts when they saw him. Meanwhile, fast-moving Menelaus led Odysseus

off the field of battle, and called for his horses and chariot,  
to bring Odysseus back to the ships.

Then Trojan Doryclus, another bastard son of Priam,  
saw nothing of Ajax until his long sword plunged deep  
into his heart; only then he saw the Argive hero, and died.  
Then Ajax brought Lysander and Pyrasus and Pylartes  
all down to Hades with a few lightning-quick strikes of his hand.  
As when a river swollen with heavy rain and melting snow  
comes tearing down a mountainside as a torrent driven by  
Zeus' tumultuous storms, and rips many a dry oak tree  
and many a pine right out of their roots, and carries it all,  
the natural wrack and ruin, down into the deep salt sea,  
where all is lost; just so on that long ago day did Ajax  
stream wildly over the plain, brilliant in armour and power,  
killing both horses and men. Many warriors that day felt  
themselves torn apart limb from limb by his invincible hands.

Meanwhile, Trojan leader Hector knew nothing of Ajax's  
mayhem, for he was grappling hand-to-hand with Achaeans  
by the banks of the river Scamander, where many heads kept  
splashing into the waters. And a warrior cry arose  
along the Trojan lines until all voices joined as one cry  
that shook the sky (compelling Zeus Supreme to peer down on them  
for a moment), as the enemy crowded round excellent  
Nestor and Ἄρκης - loving Idomeneus. Just there, Hector  
engaged in many memorably terrible deaths, with spear  
and sword and chariot and all else, and he eliminated  
whole lines of warrior youths. Even so, the Achaeans pushed  
back, and would have held position there by the bloody river,  
had not Alexandros appeared again with his sneaky bow.

Argive Helen's husband strung a three-barbed arrow on its string and brought an end to the Argive charge, by striking its leader Machaon in his right shoulder. Then the Achaeans breathed fear that this excellent man might be killed then and there. So Nestor heard the voice of Idomeneus calling to him :

"Nestor! Get up on that chariot and bring Machaon out of here! Drive the horses fast as you can! Get him to a healer to cut out the arrow and apply some *pharmakon*! Do it now!"

So spoke the younger man, and Nestor heard and obeyed. He stepped up onto the chariot-board, and Machaon leapt up beside him with the arrow sticking out of him. Nestor snapped the whip and the two horses flew wondrously quick out of the dust cloud.

Now, the battlefield was a patchwork of inconsistency. Here, the Achaeans dominated. There, the Trojans were in the ascendant. Thus the Trojan Cebriones, where he stood, beheld astonished how quickly battles turn. He stepped up to Hector standing in his chariot, and said :

"Hector, we're engaging with the Danaans here on the edge of the battle, but over there other Trojans are moving around in confusion without direction, both men and horses in chaos. It is Ajax who drives that confusion; I recognize the shield on his shoulders; it's as thick as a wall. Let's you and I get the hell over there with reinforcements of charioteers and infantry."

So the Trojan took hold of the reins, and set the horses going with a snap of the clear-voiced whip. The chariot lurched forward,

and gathered speed as it rolled joltingly over the bodies  
of the dead men and their shields, Trojan and Argive dead; and blood  
stained the axle beneath their feet; and the horses' raging hooves  
flung back blood drops over the gold breast of the chariot box;  
and the tires splashed through the puddles of blood. δῖος Hector  
was eager to enter the fray, to break down whole lines of men;  
and so he did, and his spear was given little rest from death.  
He rampaged through the commotion of Achaean warriors,  
warding off spears and swords and daggers and even flung boulders;  
but one man alone he avoided, for he bided his time,  
waiting for the one right moment : this man he shunned was Ajax.

Now Zeus Orderer, high at the helm that steers it all, thought it  
amusing to urge Ajax to flee in terror from his foe.  
So, down below, Ajax stood in amazement as panic flight  
flooded his mind, a surprise so strange and unexpected that  
it confused him. He flung his shield, seven layers of bulls'-hides  
and thick as a wall, over his shoulder, tightened its buckle,  
and, glancing curiously around him at the turbulent  
combat, step by step slowly he retreated. Each backward step  
he could hardly believe he was making, and every backward  
step he resisted; yet, still and all, Ajax was retreating,  
invincible Ajax! No, he couldn't hardly believe it,  
but it was true, it was happening, he was subdued by fear,  
he would never have believed it; and still he resisted, step  
by step, as he withdrew further from the worst of the fighting,  
his wondrous face, the very picture of incredulity.

Just as a hungry lion leaps a fence  
into a herd of cattle, and would seize  
the fattest and gorge on it, but is driven

back by dogs and hands, who refuse the lion  
to take his prize; but he, lusting after  
flesh, comes forward, but achieves nothing, for  
the stones fly sharp and sundry through the air  
from the bold hands of the men, who wave fire  
brands at him, too, from which he recoils,  
however eager; and at dawn he goes  
away, defeated, and troubled in spirit.  
Just so was Ajax troubled in spirit  
to see the enemy vulnerable  
to deep destruction before him; yet he  
withdrew, and with the greatest reluctance—  
for he hoped to protect the Argive ships,  
and retreating was no way to do this.  
But what man knows of the wry mind of Zeus?

Or, as when an ass, passing a cornfield,  
outclasses the competence of children—  
a lazy ass whose ribs have taken many  
a hit from many a cudgel. So he  
goes in and munches on the bristling grain,  
and the boys beat him with sticks and stones, but  
their strength is weak, and is hardly noticed  
by the ass, who eats his fill, then moves on  
and away, the lazy ass, on his own time.

Just so were the vigorous Trojans, with their allies, striking  
furious Ajax with spears and stones and arrows, all of which  
merely bounced off the front of his colossal shield. And Ajax  
all the while wrestled with the strange visitation of Fate  
within him. Now he stood ready to rush up and beat back the lines

of the advancing enemy, then would quickly change his mind and spin back round and start to flee, as a coward would flee.

Thus was the spectacle of Ajax's stuttering movements as he sought to overcome Zeus' will working inside him.

*But triumphantly Ajax won hold of himself;* and stormed up to the Trojans and Argives battling at the front, and held the enemy back from advancing on the precious ships.

And many spears from many a confident hand came sailing in at him only to stick fast in his massive wall-sized shield; while many others flying in never even touched his body, but fixed themselves uselessly in the dirt all round him, having failed in their greed to glut themselves on his excellent flesh.

Then Eurypylus, a brilliant warrior, Euaemon's son, saw Ajax caught in the shower of spears and stones and arrows; so he rushed to his side, took aim with his spear, and let fly. The spear pierced the liver of Apisaon, the soon-to-be-dead son of Phausius. Once a leader of men, now he was weak : his legs gave way and he dropped to the dirt. Eurypylus sprang onto his body to take his armour : but Alexandros saw, and strung an arrow on his sneaky bow, and drew the string back and struck Eurypylus in his right thigh. In towering rage Eurypylus tore at the arrow, but succeeded only in snapping the shaft in two; so the barbs stuck fast in his thigh and pain blazed up from the wound. Thus he fled from the battlefield and vanished into his turbulent army, thereby escaping the eyes of the goddesses of death flitting about the plain.

And he screamed at all the Argives round him, saying :

"Are you goddamn warriors? Face the enemy,

or this awful day ends in death for all of us!  
 See how Ajax stands in those spears and arrows!  
 How the hell is he supposed to survive that?  
 Get over there and stand by Ajax! Go destroy  
 the fucking Trojans!”

But Eurypylus swooned in pain before finishing his words,  
 and his friends caught his bloody body from collapsing to earth.  
 Then, raising both shields and spears, they crouched on one knee around him,  
 to protect him.

And from out of the tumult of combat came long-faced Ajax,  
 who came to stand by these men. He took a breath, and watched the fight;  
 and Ajax thought about things.

And so the clash of men blazed like wildfire across the plain;  
 and all the once-tight formations here and there were collapsing;  
 and something terrible was being brought to birth.

Now δῖος Achilles was standing by the stern of his ship,  
 watching the wretched tumult, watching the Achaeans getting  
 destroyed. Then he saw Nestor’s horses, dripping in sweat, carry  
 their master out of combat; and next to him stood Machaon.  
 So Achilles called out to his friend Patroclus, who heard him,  
 and stepped out of their tent. When Achilles saw ἄρης - loving  
 Patroclus appear, he sighed, and knew it was time for a change.  
 He knew something terrible was about to come to birth.

And he heard Patroclus ask him :

“Why do you call me, Achilles? What would you like?”

And Achilles answered him :

“Patroclus, the only friend I can trust in this goddamn world, expect the Achaean men to come here to drop to their knees before me in prayer. It should be soon; I think they know now that what they need can no longer be ignored. While we wait for them to grovel, go to Nestor and learn whom he brought from the field with him. I only saw the injured man from behind, and Nestor’s horses move remarkably fast for a man who moves slow, but the man I saw may have been Machaon. Find out.”

So Patroclus heard and obeyed his friend, and ran off alongside the long line of tents and ships of the Achaeans, while the dust from the battle came sifting down out of the sky onto things.

Meanwhile, when heroes Nestor and Machaon arrived at Nestor’s tent, they stepped down from the chariot onto the silent earth; and Eurymedon, the old man’s attendant, freed the horses’ necks of the yoke. During this, the two men stood in the sea-breeze on the beach and cooled themselves, and dried the sweat off their tunics. Then they turned from the uneasy waves and went inside the tent. Nestor offered Machaon the most comfortable couch, then he sat himself down in a chair. The two of them sighed and took in the blessed quiet; though the combat-noise, however muted from this distance, was inescapable. Hecamede, one of Nestor’s handmaids, saw the travail in their faces and bodies, and mixed for them a drink, a potion of many ingredients, including honey, wine, and also stimulating *pharmakon*. This fair-haired maid was a prize that the Achaeans had chosen for him when Achilles sacked Island Tenedos. The daughter of great-



hearted Arsinous, she had been far the best of the prizes,  
 for in counsel Nestor was known as best among men. So she  
 set a table before them, an elaborate beauty with legs  
 of blue enamel, and shining bright with polish, and set there  
 a wicker basket of bread, and also an onion to add  
 spice to the drink. And in the middle of the table she put  
 a very beautiful cup with base of gold; and golden studs  
 ornamented the huge cup all over, which when full was too  
 heavy for the old man to lift these days, though in times past, back  
 at home, he had been seen to raise it easily. Four handles  
 allowed the cup to be lifted, and each was carved in shape  
 of twin doves with beaks touching. Such was this colossal drinking  
 cup of ancient times. And now the handmaiden Hecamede,  
 lovely as a goddess, added to it some Pramnian wine,  
 a black-coloured drink, and grated into it some goat's cheese, then  
 sprinkled white barley meal over all as a sacred final touch.  
 Then she smiled a beautiful smile as an invitation  
 to drink. So the two men drew from the potion and quenched their thirst,  
 soothing their parched throats, and as they drank they spoke of heroic  
 deeds of long ago. δῖος Patroclus, meanwhile, stood silent  
 in the doorway; and when the old man saw, he rose from his seat  
 and led the young man in by his hand, and offered him a chair.

But Patroclus pulled his hand away and returned to the door,  
 saying :

"Surely I have no time to sit, old sir, beloved of Zeus  
 though you be; and you, sir, will not persuade me. He-who-is-feared-  
 as-the-gods-is-feared has sent me here to learn of the man who  
 was led out of combat with you. But I see the wounded man,  
 the most excellent Machaon, leader of men. So now I

must go to bring word to Achilles, most powerful of all.”

And Nestor, horseman of Gerenia, answered him :

“Now why in the world would Achilles lament the pain of one man yet ignore the many fallen? The entire army is collapsing under spear and arrow and stone and sword; and grief runs through the ships by the sea as our best men are injured by spear and sword thrusts, yet Achilles notices nothing of *that*? Diomedes is wounded, Odysseus is wounded, and Agamemnon; and Eurypylus has an arrow sticking out his thigh; and the men carried off the field are beyond number, and keeps growing, as Trojan arrows keep flying off the strings. But then there’s Achilles, δῖος Achilles, valiant Achilles—who cares nothing for the Argives, and is unable to feel pity. Is he waiting to see our ships burn to ash, though we fight hard to stop it? Is he waiting to see every last man slaughtered? I can’t fight like him; I’m not what I was; my mind still moves fast but not my hands and feet. If only I had the strength of youth! The strength I had when my people fought the Eleans over more than a little bit of cattle-lifting on my part. In reply to their anger I cut down good Itymoneus, son of Hypeirochus, a man well-known in Elis, the city where he lived, the city where I had to beat back many a man defending their wealth. While fighting for his cattle, he stood at the front and got a spear from my hands for his effort; and when he fell dead all the country people scattered in all directions in terror of their lives. In terror of me. The booty we divided up was massive in number : we drove fifty herds of cattle from the plain, fifty flocks of sheep; as many swine, as many goats; and a hundred and

fifty beautiful horses, every one a mare, and most with foals at the teat. All this we drove into Pylos by night, and king Neleus, my father, was pleased to see his young son leading such a bounty into the citadel.”

And Patroclus was about to speak, but Nestor continued :

“It took us three days to divide it all up among the people; and on the third day we sacrificed to the gods, and on the same day the Epians who live in Elis came after their wealth, and their revenge. And with them came the two Moliones, a strange pair of warriors joined as one and who lived and moved as one; and all those arms and legs could take a person down fast. That was why, by the way, they were famous throughout the wide world as ‘the Crusher’, though they were two, and not one; which I saw with my eyes. We were all young then. The place was Thryoessa, now called Thryon, a city on a high hill at the lowest point of the border of Pylos, along the river Alpheius. To reach the city you had to cross a plain, and they came in full battle array, many warriors and many horses, and surrounded the city upon a hill. Now we were far away and knew nothing of this, but goddess Athena came down from Olympus to advise us to arm for war. So we gathered together in full arms and armour, eager to fight. But old Neleus, considering my young age, refused my participation in the battle, and hid my horses from me, because he expected that someone so young must know so little about face-to-face combat. But as it happened I was a hero that day to outdo even our horsemen, though I was on foot; this was the outcome that Athena wished.”

And Patroclus was about to speak, but Nestor continued :

“Down there is Minyeïus, a river that empties into the sea by lovely Arene. There by the waters we waited for Dawn to show herself, our entire army of chariots and infantry, and by the time the sun was at its highest we came to sacred Alpheius, and we saw the enemy gathered round the lofty city, eager to tear it down. We made prayer to Athena and then we joined in battle. I was first to kill my man, and take his horses for myself—the warrior Mulius, son-in-law of the king of the Epeians, Augeias, whose eldest daughter some now call Medea. She was fair-haired, and knew about all the herbs and drugs that grow out of the wide earth. Mulius, though, would soon know nothing more, not after he felt my bronze spear sink into him, and the dust rushed up to take him away. I took his chariot and stood at the front with the best of the fighters. But the Epeians, one by one, began to flee from us, as one by one they saw Mulius dead on the earth. So it turned out that Mulius had been leader of their charioteers, and celebrated in battle. But I leapt on them like a thunderstorm of hard rain and took fifty chariots and their war-horses with them. And with each chariot I took, two warriors fell dead to earth, eliminated by the point of my spear. But Zeus Wide-Ruler preserved the Epeians from total ruin, and as night fell he let them flee into the dark, however many survivors there were. Then Athena turned us round for home, but not till I was the one to kill the last man, and leave him there to rot. And so it happened the Achaeans celebrated the name of Nestor, killer of the Moliones, twin sons of King Actor, though some say—and maybe truly—they were sons

of god Poseidon. That's what was I was once, young man. Achilles, now, *he* would keep his power to himself, for his own pleasure. I say one day he will weep when he sees the army destroyed. I was there when your father the war-minded Menoetius sent you from Phthia to Agamemnon, I and Odysseus both. We heard all as it echoed through the magnificent halls of the house of Peleus; for we were there assembling the warriors from the monumental land of Achaia. It was there we met with your father Menoetius and you. Old man Peleus, you'll remember, was burning the savoury thigh-slices of a bull to Zeus Father, who delights in thunder. We were standing in the walled courtyard. Then Peleus lifted a golden cup and poured out the flame-red wine on the ground. You and your father were standing together, having the honour of preparing the meat; and I and Odysseus stood by the doorway of the palace. And when Achilles saw us, he leaped up with amazement, and took our hands, and led us in, and invited us to sit; and he placed before us all that is right."

Then Patroclus was about to speak, but Nestor continued :

"When we'd had our pleasure in food and drink, I was first to speak, and urged you, Patroclus and Achilles, to follow us; and you were together eager to come, and on you two your fathers laid heavy commands. Old man Peleus encouraged his son to be the best and bravest, distinguished above all others; and to you, too, your father gave command : 'My son, in birth is Achilles the superior, for his mother is of celestial blood; and though he is far stronger than you, you are the older man. So speak to him wisely. Point out the right way. Convince him of the good, and he will enjoy the benefit of your thought.'

This your father said to you, but you fail to remember it.  
 Now at this critical moment speak out to wise and warlike  
 Achilles, if he will hear you. Who can say that God himself  
 will not join with your words to win over his mighty spirit?  
 Encouragement from a friend is indeed the sound of a god."

Thus spoke Nestor, and roused the rage in the spirit of the youth,  
 who left immediately and ran down the line of black ships  
 toward the son of Aeacus, Achilles. At Odysseus' ship,  
 there at the central point, the army's place of assembly,  
 where massive decisions were made, and where the army's altars  
 were prepared when sacrifice was due, there Patroclus along  
 the way met with powerful Eurypylus, who had half an  
 arrow stuck in his thigh; he had limped his way out of combat.  
 Sweat and blood flowed down his head and shoulders, and his wound gushed  
 dark blood down his leg, but he didn't look bothered, though the wound  
 irritated him. When the young man saw him, the son of wise  
 Menoetius, he took in the weight of the situation  
 for the first time, and blurted out words, saying :

"What is this terrible sight? All our leaders and kings falling?  
 No! This cannot be our destiny! We die here? Far from all  
 we know, our friends and homeland, swallowed up to glut the bellies  
 of the dogs of Troy? Come now! Hero Eurypylus, beloved  
 of Zeus, will the Achaeans hold back Hector, or are we dead?"

And the wounded Eurypylus answered him :

"Seems over to me, sorry to say, excellent Patroclus.  
 We have no defence. Soon our men will come running to their ships.  
 Once upon a time they were the bravest and the best, now they're

about to lie dead or dying with wounds from spears and arrows  
and swords and all else, sent from Trojan hands. Their strength keeps growing.

But come now! Try to keep me alive. Carry me to my ship  
and I'll tell you what to do as we do it."

And good Patroclus asked along the way :

"What will I do?"

And the wounded Eurypylus answered him :

"Cut out this goddamn complicated arrowhead from my thigh,  
to begin with. No use taking me to our own surgeons' huts;  
I hear Machaon requires his own surgeon around here  
somewhere, while Podaleirius is still out on the plain;  
that excellent man fights on, while I need him by the huts."

And good Patroclus asked him :

"But how can this be happening? Hero Eurypylus, what  
do I do? I carry a message from Nestor to deliver  
to Achilles. I was on my way to him when I met you.  
No—I can't leave you like this now."

Thus spoke Patroclus. So they came to Eurypylus' hut,  
and went inside; and immediately his attendant spread  
ox-hides onto the ground. So Eurypylus stretched himself out,  
then spoke to the others, saying :

"Bring that dagger. Now cut it out. It's barbed in a tricky way;

you may have to root around.”

So Patroclus extracted the deep-fixed arrowhead; then washed the wound with warm water. Next, he was instructed to take herbs and crush them between the palms of his hands; then placed his hands hard on the wound. Thus, all pains ended, and the wound stopped leaking blood.

End of Book XI



## Book XII

Good Patroclus cared for the wounded warrior Eurypylus,  
 while out on the battlefield the Argives and Trojans fought  
 on as one combined mass, disorderly and indiscriminate,  
 innumerable men intermixed over the vast Scamander plain.  
 And the trench that the Argives had dug, and the wall they had raised,  
 made in haste to protect their ships, and preserve all that was theirs,  
 as a precaution would serve no purpose against the swarming  
 Trojans bringing abundance of death to the Argives. And yet,  
 for so long as Hector lived, and so long as Achilles raged,  
 and the city of King Priam stood, lofty and shining, unfallen,  
 for all that time the Wall of the Achaeans stood likewise tall  
 and mighty-looking. But when all the best and bravest of Troy  
 had died, and when all those Achaeans still standing on their feet  
 (many had been killed but some were left) and King Priam's city  
 was finally obliterated in the tenth year of the war,  
 and the Argives had sailed back to their beloved homeland,  
 then Poseidon and Apollo destroyed that Wall down to nothing.  
 All the rivers that stream down from high Ida's ridges—Rhesus  
 τε Heptaporus τε Caresus τε Rhodius τε Granicus τε Aesepus,  
 τε δῖος Scamander καὶ Simois—on all of whose banks  
 had collected old shields of ox-hide, and helmets, and the dust  
 of warriors who had fought like immortals but died as men—  
 all these rivers Apollo diverted together as one  
 mammoth rush of water, and sent it smashing continuously  
 into the wall for a day, and Zeus dropped rain into the torrent  
 to swell its power and hasten the collapse of the great Wall  
 into the sea. And Poseidon Earthshaker, trident in hand,  
 led the way, sending waves up the shore and obliterating  
 all foundations of timber and stone raised by the Achaeans

with great effort, and pulled it all into the sea. He then made level again the entire strait of the strong Hellespont, and redirected the rivers back, each to its separate way, its sacred place where its beautiful waters had always flowed. All this, men say, because the Argives failed to sacrifice properly to the gods, once upon a time.

Thus was the destiny of Apollo and Poseidon to be. Just now, though, war and battle-cries blazed round the well-built Wall; and all along its heights the strong and sizable Wall rattled as the spears and stones clattered against it; and the Argives saw themselves pushed back to their precious ships, squeezed in tight between Wall and sea, in awe of Hector, author of mighty destruction and panic flight, who raged through the battle like a whirlwind of Zeus, closing in on them jostling there with spear and shield all along the lines of tents and ships, and behind them the waves of the sea. As when a lion or wild boar wheels round on his pursuers, the dogs and hunters, his heart beating high in its strength; but they, a crowd of men, stand side by side close together, and hurl spears from their quick-moving fingers in a shower of death against him; yet his high heart feels no fear, nor urge to flee, though courage brings threat; and he wheels first this way, then that way, measuring the strength of the lines of men, and wherever he charges, the lines open up : just so, Hector smashed through enemy lines, calling back to his men to follow him up to the trench and across it. But as he neared it, his quick-galloping horses halted with a jolt; they dare not make the leap. So they neighed loudly and restlessly at the edge of the deep, and jumped about, and ground their teeth, and saw the wide space yawning from edge to edge, and its dark depths : no easy leap to make, for the sons of the Achaeans had erected a palisade of sharp-tipped stakes along the rim

of the far side of the trench : numerous, ordered close, and fearsome  
 to enemies attempting a leap. Indeed, no easy feat  
 it would be for horses drawing chariots to reach that far  
 ground. But his foot-soldiers came up, eager to get down inside  
 it and across, come what may. And daring Polydamas came  
 up close beside Hector thinking on his chariot, and spoke :

“Hector, forget it! Their ditch is too dangerous to cross; our  
 horses are smart enough to see it! Look at the stakes down there!  
 And if we gather strength and get through, that Wall will trap our men  
 at the front and crush them as the rest rush through and assemble  
 behind; there’s not enough room over there. Anyway, why the hell  
 would we want to take a chariot down there? You want to fight  
 in such a narrow space? I think we will suffer if we fuck  
 with this ditch. That thunder we heard earlier? Maybe it was  
 for us. I want those unknowns dead as much as you do, but if  
 we get tangled up down there, no one of us will be left even  
 to bring the bad news to the city. Hector, what do you think?”

And Hector answered him :

“Okay. I’m not going to argue with you or my horses.  
 Come now! All Trojan leaders and allies! Have all men dismount  
 the chariots (and have the attendants restrain the horses).  
 We’re moving forward on foot, fully armed and armoured. Follow  
 me. This is our chance! If they fall here, they’re ruined forever!”

So spoke Hector, and all were impressed with his words.

Hector then jumped from his board down to earth, and his armour  
 rattled round him. And all the other Trojans jumped from their boards

onto the dirt, once they saw δῖος Hector on foot. So each man ordered his driver to curb the horses there by the trench; and the Trojan foot-forces formed five divisions of warriors, each commanded by a leader of men.

The first company quickly gathered : for all men were eager to go with Hector and the excellent Polydamas, knowing those two had the best chance to smash through the wall, and fight through to the ships; so Hector soon had many eager men gathered round him, including, by Hector's choice, his own driver Cebriones. (So Hector left behind for his horses a man much weaker than his charioteer.) Paris and Alcatous led the second company with Agenor; and Helenus and powerful Deiphobus, both sons of Priam, led the third company, and the third man with them was Asius, canny warrior : Asius, Hyrtacus' son, who had come from Arisbe on a sleek and shining horse reared by the river Selleis. And the leader of the fourth company was the courageous son of Anchises, Aeneas; and beside him were two sons of Antenor, Archelochus and Acamas, who knew all there was about all manner of fighting. And Sarpedon led the allies, and chose Glaucus and war-hungry Asteropaeus as seconds, for they were much distinguished in battle, and he himself was the best fighter even among all these heroes.

So the companies of men closed ranks. They stood in tight lines with shields touching end to end, and advanced on the Achaeans in straight lines, breathing fury, having no thought of restraint, but only to fall on the precious black ships.

So the Trojan warriors advanced on the trench,

and the Wall behind it (if they survived the crossing down below); but, at it happened, the Achaean forces, having shot the bolt of the gate of their Wall and opened it wide, decided it better to concentrate all defence where they stood, to prevent their ships becoming bonfires along the beach. Let them fall here, and be ruined forever; or harry the Trojans back within the safety of *their* walls.

So the Trojans began flooding over the trench.

The scene recalled the ancient and obscure story of the fox from Teumessus, a place somewhere along the highway of sorts from Thebes to Chalcis. Frenzied, noisy Dionysus, god of Mysteries and Madness reared a gigantic blood-thirsty fox, then set it on the children of Thebes, in retaliation for an insult no one knew anything about. The Teumessian fox had eaten many a child by the time Artemis put Zeus' dog on him, Laelaps, the shining hound that caught everything it chased. But twice-born Dionysus raised the fox as a trickster creature never to be caught. So there it was : the hunting dog who always caught its prey now chased the fox who would never be caught. Zeus flung both into the heavens where they glimmer now as constellations pursuing each other through the night, what people call the two dogs. So this was Zeus' present decree : a balance of power. One side or the other might wear the laurel crown of victory.

But some men would fall from their own idiocy.  
 While all other Trojans and their illustrious allies  
 now followed Hector's command, Asius alone,  
 Hyrtacus' son, disobeyed; for he was not  
 willing to leave his horses behind. So he formed  
 a plan of his own, and with his attendant devised  
 a causeway over the trench simply by binding  
 beams of timber together, while the army  
 marched on among him and beyond. But this bridge built  
 by Asius brought him straight to his death. Yet Fate  
 would draw out his life until he came to the lines  
 of his friends facing the open gate of Victory.  
 Just when he thinks of the honour he will exult  
 in, when returning victorious to the city  
 of Troy across the plain, just then the hateful Fates  
 will embrace him, and drag him down unhappily  
 into darkness : for now a spear sent from the hand  
 of noble Idomeneus is destined to pass  
 through his body, and there is no way around this.  
 (How Ajax beat Destiny is a secret Zeus alone knows.)

He will never return across the windy plain  
 to Troy, exulting in victory on his horses  
 and chariot, not while the son of Deucalion lives.

But for now Asius was driving his horses  
 along the left end of the infantry, along  
 a path the Argives always followed when coming  
 back with horses and chariots from the plain.  
 Following this dirt track, his horses curved in toward

the open gate; and when Asius saw their shelter  
 free to enter, he shouted to his men, to rouse them,  
 a cry of no surrender; and all his men roared  
 in answer, war-cries frothing at their mouths, for they  
 believed the Achaeans were about to collapse,  
 and the invaders would fall on their perishable  
 ships; and that would be that. But these men did not know  
 that two of the best men, war-loving sons of the  
 fierce Lapiths, stood now by the gate, ready to face  
 all comers : one, much-killing Polypoetes,  
 a man whose strong hands delight in allotting death,  
 son of mighty Peirithous; and the other,  
 man-destroying, Ἄρκος - loving Leonteus.  
 These two stood tall before the open gate like two  
 lofty oaks on mountain peaks, that stand fixed in place  
 with tendrilous roots clutching the earth with immovable grip,  
 and hold fast through all the days of wind and rain : just so  
 these two warriors waited patiently for King Asius  
 to reach them. So while some of the Trojan army stormed up  
 to the Wall to scale it, Asius led his shield-bearing  
 warriors straight for the gate, as did the leaders  
 Iamenus and Orestes; and Adamas, son of Asius;  
 and Thoön, and Oenomaus. All these screamed a bestial  
 outcry of victory, and held their own solidly-built shields  
 in front of them, and made for the gate to the Argive army,  
 (now more-than-motivated to protect their lives and their ships).  
 Some of the Argive spearmen and charioteers advanced on  
 the Trojans attempting to overmaster the Wall; and came  
 on like an animal thrashing through the twigs and branches of  
 a forest, ripping up roots and causing noisy uproar along  
 the way : just so the Argive warriors crashed wildly through

the Trojan onslaught at the Wall, falling upon them like brilliant tusks stabbing out and taking their lives, while the bronze clashed in hand-to-hand combat, where men stake their lives on their strength.

And death from above came down as a shower of stones began to spray out from all along the rim of the wall, where soldiers were poised, throwing what were no small stones either, but even rolling boulders off the edge, to save their lives, not just from death, but a worst death, a slaughterous end, of dying in pieces.

So the Argives hurled many a stone from their sturdy wall's height, defending themselves and their tents and their ships, and each other; and the stones sprinkled down through the air like snowflakes pummelling the dark face of the all-nourishing earth : the immense air gushed with stone, as when rushing black clouds drop showers crackling on surfaces; even so the helmets and shields of the invaders, all that bronze gear, echoed with the drumming reverberations of rocks sprinkling down and collecting on the darkened earth.

And over the shimmering noise of this battering, Asius, Hyrtacus' son, cried out into the sky that sheltered Troy :

"Zeus, you're a liar if you allow this to be!  
Who would have expected them to stop up our way  
so wholly? Stop our power? and our man-breaking hands?  
These bastards are like bees or wasps who refuse to  
quit their nest by a wayside; but spill out like poison  
and attack men, who run away; and so protect  
their brood. These two Argives refuse to let us through!  
They're minded to cut us down till they fall down dead."

So spoke Asius, but Zeus paid no attention to his voice;  
for it was to Hector instead that Zeus preferred to give glory.



So the warriors fought in close combat in two places :  
 at the gate, facing the two Argive heroes, and along the Wall.  
 Difficult it is for me to describe all this thoroughly;  
 to do so one would have to be as a god.

At the foot of the Wall, along its length, the Trojans lit fires  
 to chase off the stone-throwers above; and the Achaeans, still  
 with their ruin in the balance, pushed back with all of their force  
 against unyielding Asius and his men at the gate.

Then the war-hungry Lapiths leapt into the fray by the gate,  
 beside powerful Polypoetes, Perithous's son,  
 whose spear crossed the air and hit Damasus full in the helmet,  
 and his face didn't slow down the spear-tip, which shattered his skull  
 and his brains ran out : so the raging Polypoetes broke  
 him forever, then whirled round and killed Pylon with his bare hands,  
 and Ormenus, too. Ἄρης - loving Leonteus, meanwhile,  
 watched his lethal spear run through the belly of Hippomachus,  
 son of Antimachus; then drew his sword and pushed through warriors  
 struggling in battle, and with a percussive strike that rang out  
 louder than a stone he brought Antiphates to the surface  
 of the earth, and his dead spirit sank below. Then he brought  
 Menon, and Iamenus, and Orestes, each to his end,  
 lying broken on the earth among all the other limp dead.

And the battle had a third area, as it happened : the edges  
 of the trench. Now the youths daring enough to follow Hector  
 and Polydamas was a tremendous number, including  
 all the best and bravest of Trojans; but when the offensive  
 pressed on, some of these youths, not so brave, lingered at the hindmost,

and were now doing only what they had seen much worthier warriors doing : stripping the dead of its armour. So while their fellow warriors were striving eagerly to scale the Wall, and push through the gate, to get to the ships, and set them aflame, these youths left the corpses where they lay, and looked into the sky to watch a bird of omen flying over their heads, a high-reaching eagle freed of all bounds, and it seemed shining. But when the long-soaring eagle reached the left end of the sky, they saw it held a snake in its talons, struggling and thrashing; in colour, a deep-red; and as the youths below wondered at this, the snake lashed out at the eagle's breast and neck, attempting to sink its venom into the beast, but the eagle simply made a move, and pieces of the snake sprinkled down onto the heads of the youths below. Then, with a shriek, the eagle veered off and away into broad, deep sky. The youths on the ground shuddered, and looked about them, and at each other, in icy silence, for they all understood that the snake was them, and the eagle—the continuing, enduring, endless power of the gods. So then the heroic Trojan youths lost all desire to strip the fallen of their armour, there by the trench.

Meanwhile, the two fronts of the Trojan onslaught had broken down : its finely-ordered divisions had confusedly merged into one cascading mob overwhelming the Argive Wall all the way to the wide-open gate of the enemy camp, its ships vulnerable to attack and destruction. Hector, hacking through the Achaeans with death-delighting hand, was seen by Polydamas, who came near to him, and spoke out, saying :

“I’m just a soldier, Hector, but you like my words when you hear them, even if they often challenge

your own. I think it my duty to inform you  
 I fear us pressing on to the ships. We should cease  
 now and retreat, till we understand things better.  
 You and I both saw that eagle of Zeus fly up  
 to heaven. That snake in its grip was alive, till  
 it wasn't. If I read that right, we're to think its  
 young ones in the nest will go hungry—the eagle  
 cut the food to pieces and dropped it on us.  
 Does that sound auspicious to you? I think even  
 if we get to their ships we shall not enjoy it.  
 Should we withdraw for now? till one of our seers,  
 having better skill to interpret these sky-signs,  
 calls my words certain, or foolish? Do we retreat,  
 convinced by the word of Zeus? Or do we go on?"

So Hector turned roughly to Polydamas, his helmet bronze  
 flashing fire, and with darkened brow he answered him, saying :

"Polydamas, your words do more than challenge me; right now they  
 tell me to kill you. Read into a flying bird any way  
 you want! If Zeus would speak, let him do it clearly! Otherwise,  
 give up your speculation in an eagle flying left or right!  
 We have been given great strength by Olympus, that much I know;  
 or why would the gods allow us to reach this triumphant point?  
 You say that Zeus would bring us this far only to destroy us?  
 I don't believe it. If you quit the field, or persuade others  
 with your evil words to quit, I will kill you with my bare hands."

So spoke Hector, who led the fighting at the Wall,  
 shouting commands to his men while pushing through  
 the crowd, cutting down Argives in his way; and Zeus

of the Abyss, who from Mount Ida's peak lets loose  
the winds that blow all things forward, just now was not  
even watching as the Trojans attacked the Wall,  
attempting with iron hand-tools and with levers  
to pry the stones loose to make it all tumble down;  
but flesh-tearing Argive warriors kept flooding  
onto the enemy in heavy waves; and for  
every stone that was wrenched from the wall, some bunched-up  
ox-hide was slipped into the crack, and the Argives  
kept their lofty fortification upright for now.

And the two Ajaxes also stomped alongside  
the wall, thundering this way and that, back and forth,  
continually encouraging the Argives,  
some with a joke, while screaming angrily at others,  
calling them slackers; and exhorting everyone  
to push the Trojans off the Wall, and shove them back  
into the trench, where they could be carved up nicely.

So as they went on, here and there they spoke, saying :

"Argives! Friends! Whoever we are in life, we're all  
equal now, and in it together! So fight for  
the man next to you, who fights for you! Do it now!  
You know what we face! Anything less than your best  
and we die! Go on! Each urge the next to kill them  
all! Kill them all and Zeus Lightning may give us back  
all our strength; then we'll push them back to the city!"

So the pair shouted as they went along, and roused  
the warriors to greater killing effort. So both sides fought

according to Zeus' present decree : a balance of power.

One side or the other might wear the laurel crown of victory.

Just as when snowflakes fall thick and numerous on a winter's day, when God is minded to rouse the snow to fall down upon the earth, thereby revealing to us those gentle darts of his; and he lulls the air into a sleep, and the flakes fall straight down continuously until the mountain summits and the reaching headlands and the grassy plains and the well-ordered, deep-soiled fields of men and the harbours and beaches of the ancient sea are all covered in snow (though the wave reaches up and scours it away from the sand) : but all else is covered in whiteness like one continuous blanket that fluttered down from above to fall heavily on the earth, covering the fertile soil, and indiscriminate all along its uniform way : just so was the air by the Wall awash in showers of spears and stones and arrows and all else, in equal numbers falling upon Trojan and Argive alike, as the men flung them back and forth, indiscriminate just now to the Olympians and left to themselves, to their shouts resounding along the Wall.

And when Achaean warriors began flying through the air, smashing against the Wall and breaking every bone doing so, then the Trojans knew Sarpedon was roused to his angriest. He threw men the way others throw stones. So the Argives spread out around him but he charged them as a lion leaps into cattle. The shield he held before him had been hammered into perfect balance by a skilled bronzesmith, a perfect circle, and its thick layers of dry ox-hide were stitched together with golden wire that ran continuously round the entirety of the disc. Suddenly he had two long spears in his hands, and he went to the Argives as a lion, mountain-raised and rugged, too long

in need of food, gets into a craftily-built enclosure  
 of sheep; and though he find there herdsmen and dogs guarding the sheep,  
 his indomitable spirit will not retreat until he's made  
 an attempt on the flocks. He knows he will either carry off  
 a dead thing with him, or be killed by a spear that a skilled hand  
 had aimed. Just so it was do or die as Sarpedon saw it.

So he cried out to friend Glaucus, saying :

"Follow me, Glaucus, and advance into a glorious death :  
 either our own, or another's at our victorious hands!"

And Glaucus responded :

"Keep killing, Sarpedon, and you'll keep earning your honoured seat  
 at the feasts, and your cup will stay full! Then you can get back to  
 your palace in Lycia by the banks of swirling Xanthus!"

And Sarpedon responded :

"Your house is no smaller than mine—so ensure you feed death well!"

Thus the two warriors spoke, laughed, raised their weapons,  
 and carved through the havoc among the company of Lycians.  
 The black smoke breathed by the various fires along the base  
 of the wall obscured the air, and the fast-moving back-and-forth  
 of spears and arrows and stones, and the jostling of men  
 wrestling in death-struggles, some with daggers, some with bare hands  
 pushing men face-first into the dirt : but, through all the tumult,  
 Menestheus, Peteos' son, saw Sarpedon and Glaucus  
 stalk among their people, and he shuddered in terror to see

their death-bringing hands that promised misery; so, bumping in to men all round him he looked every which way in a panic for any Achaean leader to come and defend this part of the Wall and help save himself and his fellow warriors. Through the fiery smoke he saw the two Ajaxes killing fine warriors, and he saw Teucer as well, having just stepped into this part of the field. So panicky Menestheus let out a cry, a far-reaching call, for these leaders to come, but his cry went unheard amid the deafening battle-sounds; and he foresaw Sarpedon and Glaucus storming right over him to bring death in through the open gates of the Argive camp. Terrifying was the fact that he was wounded in the leg, so was unable to flee from their oncoming menace : so he grabbed a man named Thoötes and spoke in agitation :

“Go, Thoötes, run quick and bring Ajax! Either one will do; but both would be better! Tell them ruin comes for us, even the mightiest Lycians, though we’ve been fighting like mad dogs! Let Ajax, Telamon’s son, come alone, if need be. Maybe Teucer will come with him, and demonstrate his skill with the bow? Go, Thoötes, run quick!”

So spoke panicky Menestheus, and Thoötes ran off through the chaos until he reached the two Ajaxes. He then delivered the wounded man’s message, as he was asked to do.

Mighty Telamonian Ajax heard the call, then spoke out to Ajax the smaller, Oïleus’ son, saying :

“Stay here with good Lycomedes. Keep everyone fighting hard.  
I’m going over there to stomp on some Trojans. When some Lycians  
lie dead I’ll be back.”

Thus Telamonian Ajax, who went off without waiting  
for an answer, kicking corpses out of his way. With him went  
Teucer, his brother from the same father; and Pandion came  
too, the man entrusted with holding Teucer’s ultraprecise  
bow. So the three of them pushed through the earth-quaking battle,  
through the shower of spears and arrows and the fiery smoke.  
They used the black smoke rising from the base of the Wall as cover  
for their advance; so quickly reached the wounded Menestheus  
and their people, who just now were overwhelmed by the Trojan  
warriors striving eagerly for the Wall, advancing like  
a storm coming furiously down over the Achaeans;  
but Ajax came out of the black smoke, as colossal in size  
as any man who had ever lived; and the two sides faced off  
with a shrieking war-cry.

The wounded Menestheus watched Ajax lift a massive stone,  
one that the Trojans had wrenched from the Wall; so heavy a stone  
that no man ever since has lifted such a weight with two hands  
only : and he dropped it on Sarpedon’s good friend Epicles,  
who saw it come down from on high as a mountain might collapse,  
and the bones of his head were crushed flat; and his spirit flitted  
away. His four-horned helmet had been of no use there. Teucer,  
meanwhile, struck Glaucus, strong son of Hippolochus, after  
he scurried up a Trojan’s ladder and let off an arrow  
from the top of the Wall, when he saw Glaucus’ arm appear  
from under his shield for an instant; thus Glaucus was taken  
out of the fight. He withdrew quickly, so that no Achaean



might see him wounded, and exult over it with scathing words.

And Sarpedon saw Glaucus go, and grieved, yet fought on, and thrust his spear through the heart of Alcmaon, Thestor's son; then drew the spear back and turned away before the body fell to earth, the exquisitely carved bronze armour rattling round it.

Then Sarpedon flung his spear aside and reached out with both hands and fixed his fingers firmly on a heavy stone fitted in the Wall, and wrenched it out. Then he watched as many stones above it collapsed. And so Sarpedon had opened a way into the Argive camp for his army of warriors to pass through.

But Ajax and Teucer acted together against him. Teucer strung a lethal arrow and let fly while Ajax sprung at him, striking him full-body with a push of his man-sized shield. So Sarpedon staggered from Ajax's blow, yet stayed on his feet; and though Teucer's arrow hit its mark, it stuck fast in the shield strap, whose shining leather stopped the arrow-point cold; so Sarpedon survived the two-pronged attack; and stepped away into the swarm of Lycians, and out of sight. But Ajax and Teucer, through smoke and fire and struggling men, heard him scream out :

"You Lycians! Where are the 'godlike' Lycians?  
Where are the 'equal-to-the-gods' Lycians? Show yourselves now and fight! For I can't do it alone!  
I can lift their stones one by one, but our work here now needs more than two hands! Come, follow me and break a way open to their ships! The more hands, the better the work!"

Thus spoke Sarpedon, and the Lycians shuddered at his words

rebuking them, and shuddered at his retreat; and the Argives  
 by this time were consolidating their forces by the Wall  
 into a tightly-ordered battle formation, and pushed back  
 against the Trojans and their allies; and hard work came to them,  
 came to all, there by the edge of the Scamander plain. The breach  
 in the Wall was inviting, but no man could yet slip past the  
 band of Achaeans defending the way on the other side.  
 Nor could the Achaeans push the enemy back from the Wall  
 entirely, not now, now that they had come so close. So, like  
 two men with allotments in a common field arguing over  
 a boundary stone, using measuring-rods as their tool of choice,  
 both quarrelling for an equal share of it, there in the narrow  
 space; even so the two armies faced off, but here with convex  
 shields butting one another head-on; and the unpredictable  
 blazons (strips of leather fluttering around over the shield  
 face, each with terrifying monsters sewn on, and always in  
 motion) sought to catch the enemy's eye for a lethal moment.  
 Indeed, many men died from thrusts of the cold bronze into their  
 bodies, any time they left themselves unprotected even  
 for a second. Or spears shot right through shields and killed their man.  
 And all their side of the wall was spattered with the blood of man,  
 both Trojan and Achaean, mixed. But the Trojans could not make  
 the Achaeans withdraw in panic flight, but they held on, just  
 as the twin balances of a scale, one with a standard  
 weight, the other with puffs of wool, come to level out in the  
 hand of an artisan woman, who then takes her meagre pay,  
 —food, or some cloth—and wanders on : just so, the war drew on  
 in level measure. Then, through furious death-cries and flying  
 Argive body parts, Hector came forth from out of the tumult,  
 and was seen by all; and was both cheered and dreaded. Man-killing  
 δῖος Hector shouted to the Trojans around him, saying :

“Now, all Trojans, tear down the wall! Get to the ships with your fire and set them alight!”

Thus spoke Hector, and was heard by all who could hear him.

So the Trojans pushed to the far edge of their strength and struggled their way to the Wall; while Hector ran round to the gate of the camp, now shut, and Polypoetes and Leonteus were gone.

Hector took all the time he wished, to admire the craftsmanship before him : the two doors of the gate joined seamlessly together, and he pictured the iron crossbars well-fitted to the planks, one extending along the top, and one at the bottom, with perhaps a vertical bolt reinforcing the hold of the seam.

This was a gateway constructed by the most ingenious men.

So Hector seized a large stone that stood there by the gate, and lifted it up over his head for all to see : it was conical in shape, and wondrous smooth : and no two men, the best of a community, could have easily hauled up that stone from dirt to wagon, even with tools (such is the sort of men we are now), but all alone Hector raised it lightly into the sky, just as a shepherd holds in his hand the wisps of wool from his rams, and the weight is no burden : and he brought it opposite the two closed doors of the beautifully-made gate. And Hector planted himself firmly where he stood, and flung the stone forth, and it was no weak throw that shattered the doors off their iron hinges : and the stones at its sides tumbled down with a crashing sound, and continued to tumble, and shining Hector went inside, his face like night.

But his bronze shone round his body and was fearful to look on.

Spear-tips glimmered, one here, one there, outward from him.

No one who got in his way would restrain him, and his eyes blazed fire, to warn all men to stay back. And he wheeled round the crowd

of Argive warriors, who spread out round him in a circle,  
and over his shoulder he called to the Trojans behind him :

“Do it now!”

he cried, and his army of warriors heard him, and many  
crossed over the rubble of the Wall, and many more poured through  
the well-made gate, and obeyed his command. Then the Danaans  
put to flight and broke for the ships, as a terrible noise rose.

End of Book XII

## Book XIII

Zeus, once he permitted Hector and the Trojan warriors to reach the precious Achaean ships, gave no more attention to all their continual toil and misery there, but turned his shining eyes aside to look even farther distant : to the land of the Thracians, where, just now, men were breaking horses; and to the Mysians, where, just now, boys were working at hand-to-hand combat practice; and to the Hippemolgi, the solid-hearted nomads who drank the milk of mares, and kept to themselves; and he looked to the Abii, they who abstained from all war—the most decent of men. Zeus Father no longer lowered his eyes to mere Troy, and expected no more intrusion from any Immortal in support of Danaan or Trojan.

Zeus himself, however, did not go unseen. The Earthshaker, his brother, planet-rattling Poseidon, master of the earth's driving waves, even Poseidon himself, was watching the war, from a spot in a wooded space high up on the deep-forested slopes of Samothrace Island, and not only saw Priam's Troy and the Argive ships and the entirety of the plain between them, the dusty, windy spot run through by the River Scamander and overlooking the waves of the sea : earth-holding Poseidon also saw Zeus Brother-Father avert his eyes away from the war. He had just risen up out of the sea and sat down to watch, his massive form perfumed in sea-spray, and frowned to see the Argives facing ruin by the waterside.

Straightaway down the rocky mountain Poseidon rushed with quick and heavy step, making all the highlands and their forests tremble as he moved, the Immortal. It took only four strides

to get from Island to mainland, to the river Krasis, by  
which the town of Aegae sits (in southern Achaea, by Argos).

Two other mighty rivers flow into Krasis and increase  
its flood; and deep in its mixed waters stood his glowing palace,  
a spot all men know well of, for this deep-water hideaway  
of lofty golden form rises undecaying and forever.

He came there, and put his golden-hooved, quick-galloping horses  
to his chariot, their wavy manes enormous in extension  
when they run; and, himself clothed in gold, stepped onto his chariot,  
holding a whip of twisted golden thread; and drove his horses out  
from the palace toward the salt-water waves of the sea. When he  
dashed through his dark and deep domain all the wondrous creatures  
played round him in great number, the seals and fish and sea-monsters,  
for they recognized their master, and joyfully made way for  
him, as he moved easily through the waters : the bronze axle,  
meanwhile, turning the quick wheels of his chariot, stayed dry.  
Thus his horses, his wondrous horses (the friskiest alive)  
brought their beloved master close to the Argive ships propped up  
at an edge of the ancient sea.

A deep cave lies at the bottom of the sea, somewhere, it's said,  
between Tenedos and Imbros, though all the words about it  
are doubtful ones. There, Poseidon Earthshaker brought his horses  
to a standstill. He freed them from the yoke, then tossed them morsels  
of ambrosia, which they happily nibbled up. Then, in pleasure,  
they would stand in place and await their master's return; for he  
was gone to the army of the Achaeans.

Trojans, working together as one integrated force, blazed  
all round like wild gusts of fire, following eagerly after

Hector, King Priam's son, heir to the city of Troy, whose cries were matched by those of his men, and the fire shrieked as it burned through the Achaeans, and saw victory ahead—the Trojans taking the Argive ships and burning them to ash, and right there killing all of the best of their men. The Argive army, meanwhile, stood its ground, defending its ships with deliberate silence.

And so, as is their way, the way of the Immortals, who do as we cannot, master Poseidon, Earthshaker and brother of All, came to men's ears through a long-recognizable voice : just now, the voice and body of Calchas, the Argive army's foremost prophet, he who reads significance in bird flight, and in steaming entrails; and, mixed now with Earthshaker, his voice was clear and powerful and persuasive; and his energy in speech was unflagging.

First he strode alongside the two Ajaxes. Eager to kill all Trojans streaming into their camp, they only half-listened while rearming themselves and securing their bronze. And Calchas encouraged them, saying :

"You two Ajaxes will be the saving of us all, if you stay strong and concentrate for as long as it takes. You have no fear, and that's a fine edge. But Hector is fearless too; as a madman is fearless of what reason affrights at. The Trojans are flooding over the collapsed Wall, and spilling through the demolished gate; and just now these two streams are joining into one overwhelming power with Hector as its head, who rages like raving flames of fire through us, as if God and he were one and the same. But you two : just be as you are, and you will stand unyielding, and others will see, and act

as you do; and so we will drive them back from the precious ships,  
even if God himself is motivating them.”

Planet-rattling Poseidon in the shape of seer Calchas  
raised the staff of prophetic office and touched the Ajaxes  
as they hurried along; and in their limbs, in their hands and feet,  
they suddenly felt lighter, and their weapons as weightless as  
a wisp of fleece in the hand of a shepherd. Then, as a hawk  
breaks into sky, quick-winged, and soars over a steep rock,  
waiting aloft to start in pursuit of another bird across  
the plain : just so Poseidon darted away, Mover of Earth.

Then the two Ajaxes eyed each other, and the quick-moving  
son of Oïleus was first to speak, saying :

“Ajax, you see the gods are on our side, regardless of where  
we stand; for old Calchas couldn’t move that fast if he were aflame!  
Yet he kept with us, and spoke without taking a breath! Old men  
can’t do that—but gods can. To know such powerful allies are ours  
fills me with a newfound affection for fighting and killing.”

And Telamonian Ajax, colossal in size, greatest  
fighter after fast-moving δῖος Achilles (now resting),  
answered the other with :

“I hear you. The feel in my hands of these spears arouses me;  
and I quiver not with fear but with rage, though my feet stand firm  
beneath me. Just let that god give me what I want : face-to-face  
with Hector—and I’ll beat his madness and all else out of him.”

In this way the two Ajaxes spoke together, delighted



to be entering combat with some god watching their back.

Meanwhile, Calchas moved with that curious swiftness of foot that didn't fool the Ajaxes, as plain-trembling Poseidon came to the rear of the Achaean battle array, there by the edge of the camp on the beach, where at its outer limits stood Achilles' tent; and he was intent on refreshing all hearts for battle. The soldiers he saw here by the black ships stood slack from exhaustion and sorrow, for they knew the Trojans were flooding into the camp through more than one break in defence. Poseidon watched as a multitude of warriors dropped their heads to let tears fall, because there was nowhere left to go but through Hades gate.

So Lord Poseidon walked among them as Calchas, and spoke out :

"What is this? Are you little boys at war-practice? I never thought I'd see the day when warriors were weeping in misery—for themselves! Though I never thought I'd see the day the Trojans come and flatten us! ὦ πόποι ! The timid deer have stepped from the forest, and have come as jackals, and leopards, and as wolves, and feast over an army with no fight left in it! The bars of the gate are broken; this is it! So are you going to sit here and be overrun? That's how you'll spend your last living day? Bullshit! You womanly weaklings defend what's yours! Make good this cowardly whimpering with medicinal killing! Let your rage out one more time!—let your hands one more time go wild and cut them all down, you, the best of the Achaeans! Killing them will cure you of heartsickness—all this is true! So get into the fight!"

This Calchas said to Teucer and Leïtus and Peneleos and Thoas and Deïpyrus and Meriones : and his

winged words mastered the winds of war and stirred all to frenzy.

So the Earthshaker cheered on the men, who regained all control of order, even with their frenzied hearts; and battle-lines formed, and the two Ajaxes came with them in the centre of the array; and so powerful was the army that Ἄρης could not come along only to laugh and mock at them; nor Athena goddess, who drives ordered armies on : and the two Ajaxes, most distinguished of Achaean warriors on the battlefield (at the moment), met Hector's army head-on. Spear slapped at spear, shield butted shield, helmet knocked against helmet; and man met man : and as the men moved their heads the shimmering horsehair touched each other, when the ridges of their helmets bent forward, so close they stood in formation and fighting. Spears clattered overhead from bold hands and every which way. And the Achaean mind stayed straight, and craved fight.

And the Trojan army forced itself forward all together as one inundation led by δῖος Hector coming on strong.

Just as in wintertime a trickle of a mountain-stream comes to be swollen by rain and melting snow into a torrent raging down the summit of a mountain, and having leapt from its foundations flies down from on high, inexpressibly wondrous, and pushes a boulder off its cliff-face that rolls roundly on, shattering woodland unstoppably as it crashes through trees mercilessly, only to roll down onto a level plain and come to a stop, and then all that speed is gone : in this way, Hector for awhile drove onward and threatened to capture the tents and the ships; but as he saw the prize ahead of him, killing his way forward, the sons of the Achaeans came close

and Hector fought off simultaneous face-to-face combat, double-tipped spears and swords assailing him. He reeled backward from the many blows, finally; then kept getting pushed back; and lost much ground as the Achaeans defended themselves against his awesome power. Then he shouted to everyone around him :

“What is wrong with you men? Lycians, Dardanians, *Trojans*! They’re lined up like a wall—so go on and smash through this second wall! They’ll drop to my spear one by one and we’ll win. All I do is to believe the promise given by Supreme Orderer Zeus!”

So spoke the leader of the Trojans, Hector, Priam’s eldest son, who had much to lose if Zeus was only toying with him; but a suspicion of that kind did not yet cross δῖος Hector’s mind, as he rallied his warriors to increase to the utmost their courage and fighting spirit, while the sun continued to rise over the plain. So, pushing through the front-lines by Hector came warrior Deïphobus, advancing with light battle-step under shelter of his perfectly-balanced shield; so, among the Argives, Meriones raised his shining spear and threw, and did not miss his target, but hit that perfect shield, and the spear-point drove through layers of ox-hide; yet battle-wise Deïphobus, having seen the spear coming, had thrust his shield out to catch it; but his eyes went wide when the spear-point burst out through the back of his ox-hide. Lucky for him, when he’d raised shield he’d snapped the spear, that pitiless death from above, into two pieces, so stopped its forward momentum, and Deïphobus lived to see the twinkling brazen spear-point look him in the eyes. Then concern, which some might call fear, filled Deïphobus’ heart as he contemplated the half-a-spear sticking in his shield; and he looked for death-minded Meriones, but that spearman

was gone. He had withdrawn into his company of fellow warriors, furiously angry that his shattered spear had lost him the victory; and he stomped away along the ships of the Achaeans, meaning to rearm himself with long spears he kept stored in his tent. Meanwhile, the others continued to fight with a ceaseless noise.

Teucer, then, Telamon's son, was the first to cut down his man, warrior Imbrius, son of Mentor, he-who-possesses-many-horses. His life story was like many another's : lost to history. He had lived in a town somewhere near Troy, Pedaeum. There he lived before the sons of the Achaeans came, and was husband to Medesicaste, one of the many illegitimate daughters of King Priam. But when the far-sailing ships of the Danaans came, he returned to Troy as a man renowned among the Trojans, and he lived in Priam's palace; and the king loved him equal to his children born in wedlock. But that was that for Imbrius, when son of Telamon Teucer ran his spear in under his ear and yanked it back out; and long night came to honoured Imbrius, endless night, and he toppled down like an ash-tree aspiring high on a summit conspicuous from all round, then its bark is cut by the bronze, and its tender leaves come to rest upon the earth; just so he fell to the ground and his bronze armour rattled round him. So Teucer set out to strip that armour. Hector, though, watching him bend to the corpse, sent a shining spear flying his way. But Teucer, looking into Hector's eyes, leaned aside, and the spear flew past him close enough for Teucer to feel its whisk, and it struck good Amphinomus, a leader of the noble Epeians, dead-centre in the chest, and he dropped to earth, and his bronze armour rattled. Hector, then, who had vanquished him by fate, charged forward to tear the helmet

off the head of the dead man; but Ajax charged forward, too, and lunged with his spear at Hector, who saw bronze glimmering before him and quit running just in time, because the sharp tip hit his armour, but went no further, for Hector was exceedingly battle-wise; so the spear only touched him as he came to a halt, but it caused him to step back from the dead men, which the Argives then dragged off.

It were the two leaders of the Athenians, Stichius and the wounded Menestheus, who carried the dead body of Amphimachus away into the Achaeon army. Imbrius, meanwhile, the two Ajaxes dragged off roughly, their spirits mad with war and its compulsive resolve to kill. Just as two lions, who seize a goat fleeing from sly-fanged dogs and carry it over the dense undergrowth of the forest, holding it between them with their strong jaws high above the ground, just so the two Ajaxes hauled Imbrius high in the air, then dropped him at their feet, and stripped the body of its armour; and Ajax, son of Oïleus, cut the head off its tender neck. Burning with rage at Amphimachus' death, he flung the bare head with a swing of his body like a ball over the crowd of his warriors, who watched it soar long through the air and descend at Hector's feet, where it smashed into pieces.

Poseidon, meanwhile, marched along the rear of the Argive army, minded to rouse the weary men at the tents and ships; and saw Idomeneus rushing past in full panoply of arms and armour on a war errand.

So Poseidon appeared to the man in shape and voice of son of Andraemon, Thoas, who throughout all of Pleuron and high

Calydon was best to reign over the Aetolians there,  
and was honoured by his people as a god. Idomeneus,  
then, though quick to move on, stopped in honour of the man.

And planet-shaking Poseidon spoke out, saying :

“Idomeneus, leader and counsellor of men, may I ask  
if the Trojan threat is broken? Are the Achaeans now safe?”

And Idomeneus heard the taunt in Thoas’ speech  
and chose to ignore it just now, whether it be specific  
to him, or general to the Argives; and answered him :

“No,” he said. “Men and their names are still dying far from Argos.  
I don’t understand it; it must be a god; it’s inconceivable  
to lose this war. But what are you doing here? You love to fight.  
Do not stand down now but get in there, and drive on every man!”

And Poseidon answered him :

“Idomeneus, we either go home today victorious,  
or lay dead in the air for the relish of bitches’ burrowing  
snouts. None of us will desist from our purpose; with our whole heart  
we’ll fight. So come then! Your armour shimmers upon you like rays  
round the sun. Let’s be quick about it and get back amongst it,  
if we may do any good. Even the cowardly, when joined together,  
therein find a degree of strength.”

And Idomeneus barked one word back :

“Cowardly?”

But even as he spoke Poseidon in the shape of Thoas  
 sped away beyond mortal means, and returned to the battle;  
 and, watching this, Idomeneus could only shake his head  
 at all of it. So he went to his tent, where he retrieved two  
 long spears, and the feel of the deadly ashwood shafts in his hands  
 made him feel as Zeus might, when holding his sparkling lightning  
 high on shimmering Olympus, revealing Truth to people  
 below : even so Idomeneus sparkled like a god  
 as he ran his way back toward the battle; and along the way  
 he met Meriones, his attendant, heading to the tent  
 he'd just come from, to retrieve his own bronze-tipped spear.

And mighty Idomeneus spoke out, saying :

"Meriones, why have you left the battlefield? Are you hurt?  
 Perhaps you carry a report for me? Otherwise you should  
 not be wandering around idly, but be out there in the fight."

And Meriones answered him :

"Idomeneus, I've come to get another spear.  
 Mine broke against the shield of Deiphobus."

And Idomeneus responded :

"Deiphobus? Well—If you want a spear you'll find as many  
 as you can carry in my tent, all the trophies of my dead :  
 their last throw were by Trojans killed by me. And as I like to  
 get up close and personal when I kill, you'll also find as many  
 shields, helmets and breast-plates (and everything bright) to make you glad."

And Meriones answered him :

“Yes, and I too have many arms and armour of dead Trojans in my tent, but I can’t very well carry them all round with me. And if you were out on the field you wouldn’t see me ‘wandering’, but fighting at the front, where the satisfaction of the kill is sweetest. Some other Argives round here many know nothing of that; but you, I think, Idomeneus, should know better.”

And Idomeneus replied :

“I know who you are, so why waste words about it? Get going! No more standing here like children; someone might call us cowards. Go to the tent and get a goddamn spear.”

And so man-killing Meriones rushed to the tent, and took a death-tipped bronze spear. Then he ran back to Idomeneus, who had prepared a chariot in the meantime; for both men were ready to slaughter. And just as man-destroying Ἄρης equips for war, carefully and calmly, and together with him comes Panic, his son, just as strong and resolute as courage, who turns the heart of even the mightiest warrior to flight : just so Idomeneus and Meriones secured all their arms and armour conscientiously, knowing that Ἄρης might take either side, according to his whim of the moment; so they were eager to force a mighty death onto their foe. So they cracked the whip, and flew forward in their blinding armour toward the plain, and the fight. As their well-harnessed horses raced on, Meriones contemplated the layout of battle stretched too close along the outlay of tents and ships, and turned



to Idomeneus, and spoke :

“Idomeneus,” he said, “what do you think of the design of battle? Where do you want us to go? We look holding firm on the right; and the centre is no place for us; so it seems as if we’re heading around to the left—where, indeed, we look scattered and overwhelmed and in need of reinforcement.”

And mighty Idomeneus answered him :

“Yes, in the centre, the two Ajaxes are cutting their numbers down. Let them be first defence of the ships—if it comes to that. If they see them bringing fire, God help them from their own pyres. Let Achilles keep his quick feet up; Telamonian Ajax yields to no man; neither bronze nor stone will bring him down. For us, then, head to the left of the line. Then we’ll find out what Ἄρης has in mind, whether finally the victory be theirs, or ours.”

Thus spoke Idomeneus, as Meriones drove the horses into the fray at the left, which, mighty Idomeneus saw uneasily, was pressuring closely their precious ships. Then, Idomeneus commanded Meriones to stop.

When the enemy saw Idomeneus come into battle like a gust a flame (both he and his attendant together skilfully decorated with exquisite arms and armour), the Trojans called to each other among the jostling bodies to face off against them all together at once in a rush; and a colossal battle raved by the sterns of the black ships, a confusion of heated and combat-maddened bodies of pitiless warriors. And as clear-toned winds are driven

faster and faster, whistling up to a shrieking while eddying into a whirlwind, when the storm comes; and the dust comes to cover the roads and the paths and the ways; and the winds whip the dust upward into one obscuring mist, only to drop enough to keep the roads hidden; and confused are all things out in the land : just so the warriors joined as an obscure assembly hard to follow, as swords clashed and shields caught arrows; each man was hot in heart to bring down the next with the bronze edge. The darkened air above them bristled with the pitiless tips of man-consuming spears, quick bringers of long death, which men use to cut through flesh, and take lives away. And many eyes were dazzled by the blaze of bronze-flashing helmets with their shuddering horsehair, and bright-polished breast-plates, and shining shields, in the confusion. Only the cool-hearted would rejoice at the sight of such horror.

Thus were the two Immortal sons of double-dealing Cronos, themselves divided in direction, furnishing terrible pain to mortal men. Zeus would prefer this combat close by the ships to benefit the Trojans and Hector, so giving glory to Achilles, quickest in the race of men, when the time came. For Zeus would not have the Argives ultimately fall before the Trojans at Ilium, for he wished to make sea-goddess Thetis happy, and granting victory to her mighty-hearted son might satisfy his hopes. But Poseidon, having snuck up (so he thought) from the ancient sea, went among the Achaeans in the midst of the tempestuousness to rouse their war-strength; for it brought him low to see them suffering terrible losses to the horse-taming Trojans. So he nursed a mighty anger at Zeus for this, and did what sneaky work he might to hearten the Argives. Both were the sons of Cronos and Rhea, and shared in the blood of their all-powerful race. Zeus was the first-born,

however, and much wiser. And while Zeus was looking elsewhere, Poseidon snuck about the Argive army, applying sly aid to the warriors, appearing to them as one of their own, as he roused their battle-spirit. So their bitter rivalry knotted both sides up in chaos, and kept them toiling in ever-tightening war, where many warriors fell in death.

Then Idomeneus, though half-grey under his bright helmet, called to his men to follow; and he leapt into a company of Trojans, driving them to panic, and flight. And holding his spear-shaft up at the tip he plunged death into Othryoneus. His breast-plate with its display of ornamentation offered no protection from the spear-point that stuck fast in his belly, then was yanked out, and the blood spilled; and he fell with a rattle.

Idomeneus stood over the writhing body and spoke :

“Your name is Othryoneus of Cablesus. You came here to ask for the hand of the most beautiful of the king’s daughters, Cassandra. You came here empty-handed, with no bridal-gifts, but you promised Priam to undertake the defence of Troy, and show us all a mighty work, and the old man bowed his head, as they do in stories, and gave you the chance for her marriage. So you came here today determined to make good on the promise. Yes, Othryoneus, I heard the story. Unfortunately you met me. But be happy, because things are not all bad. If you’re able to show us all a mighty work, as you said you would to Priam, then Agamemnon himself will give you one of his daughters, his most beautiful one, and you will have a mighty life. But first you have to help us obliterate Troy. So come with me to the ships, and we’ll agree on a bride-price,

and I promise we'll go easy on you."

Thus spoke Idomeneus, while he dragged the writhing body  
by the foot through the confused combat. But Asius saw him,  
Asius, who'd brought sleek horses from the river Selleïs  
and thought them dearer than his army commander's orders,  
and he came down from his chariot to rescue the writhing  
Othryoneus, and he felt on his shoulders the breath of  
his panting horses as his driver led them close behind him.

And he looked up at Idomeneus, who had already  
anticipated him; and a spear drove through King Asius  
clean through his throat under his chin, a skilful hit of the mark.  
And he toppled as a poplar falls, or a tall oak that joiners  
cut away from mountaintops with their freshly-sharpened axes  
to become timber for seafaring ships. So Asius dropped  
to the earth, seeing the bloody dust in his hand, and moaning.

His driver, meanwhile, having lost his wits, stood numb with terror  
rather than take the horses and flee; but he came to, when he  
felt a spear transfix his belly, sent from strong Antilochus.  
As with his king, his exquisite breast-plate was a useless defence—  
so he discovered as he tumbled into the dust, where he  
gasped out his life while Antilochus, great-hearted Nestor's son,  
led the lovely horses away into his well-armoured lines.

Deïphobus, then, deep in grief for Asius, came up close  
to mighty Idomeneus and let his shining spear fly.  
But that mighty warrior had his brilliant eyes on his foe,  
so the spear hissed past his body, grazing over and away  
from him, while he crouched behind his treasured shield, perfectly  
balanced as all the shining shields of the Argive leaders were;

this one, a well-stitched strata of ox-hide capped with flashing bronze, to dazzle enemy sight, had carved upon it an odd design of concentric rings (a well-known Mycenaean trait) to not only dazzle but confuse just long enough for death to visit a hesitant opponent. But while the spear of Deïphobus passed him by, some other spear came in fast at Idomeneus, but it shattered against that massive shield of his, and he paid no further attention to it, for stray spears were contemptible and cowardly—as warrior heroes preferred face-to-face contests, and not far-away sneaky work. Idomeneus liked dispensing death up close and personal. But even as his treasured shield echoed with the battering from that spear, the spear launched from the strong hand of Deïphobus had not flown past in vain, but struck great warrior Hypsenor deep in his liver, and straightaway his knees gave way, and his colossal body, the son of Hippasus, collapsed to earth.

And Deïphobus exulted in his kill, and shouted out for the Argives to hear him, saying :

“There is my answer to your murder of Asius! Now he won’t go down to Hades alone, but enter its rotten gates with one of your own, to accompany him along the way!”

So he shouted, and enraged the Argives, and especially battle-wise Antilochus, who sorrowed for his fallen man, and ran out before Deïphobus to get to Hypsenor, and used his shield as cover, while two fellow warriors, Mecisteus, Echius’ son, and δῖος Alastor, raised up the groaning, writhing body, and took him to the ships.

And all this made Idomeneus madder, more murderous.  
 His killing hands did not cease even for a moment, but with  
 greater strength and fury he shoved many a Trojan down into  
 black night, all the while fending off futile attacks from  
 the enemy. Whether he lived or died had no meaning now.  
 The future didn't cross his mind, not as he thrived among death.

Now Zeus had a fondness for Aesyetes and his warrior  
 son Alcathous, whose wife was lovely Hippodameia,  
 oldest daughter of illustrious Anchises. She excelled all  
 other girls her age in beauty and hand-skill and understanding,  
 and her parents had loved her with all of their heart in their halls.  
 So one of the best men of colossal Troy had won her hand  
 in marriage, even Alcathous, whom now Lord Poseidon  
 tamed before Idomeneus, for he bewitched both his eyes,  
 and palsied his limbs, so he would have no power to avoid  
 the strides of oncoming death : and Idomeneus drew sword,  
 and came to the man as if approaching a pillar or tree,  
 and cut his throat. And beloved Alcathous fell to earth,  
 and Idomeneus pitched his spear into his right hand  
 and spiked it through the heart of the man, beloved of Zeus,  
 then stepped back to watch the death. And while the heart beat its last,  
 it made the spear pole quiver, until the long vibrations stopped,  
 and the spear became still. But the frenzy of "Ἄρης (war-god  
 who wasn't even paying the slightest attention to Troy)  
 still motivated mighty Idomeneus, who exulted  
 over the dead man, while looking up to shout out :

"Deïphobus, the one and only, soon dead and gone : have we  
 made good our exchange? Three Trojans fallen for one Achaean!  
 So Asius didn't require a guide to Hell after all!"

So he spoke, and Deïphobus hesitated, wondering  
 if he should bring a second man by him as reinforcement  
 against mighty Idomeneus, or face him alone. As he  
 wondered (which occupied only the duration of a sunbeam  
 flashing on bronze), he thought it better to get magnificent  
 Aeneas to stand beside him. So he rushed through the battle,  
 and found him not at the front, but off on his own, and raising  
 no weapon against the enemy; for trash talk flung between  
 the opposition had worked against Aeneas in the instance.  
 (It was something long in the past, that his father Anchises  
 was ousted from Troy's throne by Priam, so that δῖος Aeneas  
 should one day rule a kingdom in happiness. Yet, as it was,  
 Aeneas fought with the best of the warriors in defence  
 of the city, yet received no respect from its noble king.)

So Deïphobus came near to the young hero and spoke :

"Aeneas, great arm and mind of us all, noble Aeneas,  
 now you must show the best of yourself, before the eyes of all,  
 and defend your sister's family! Would you have your sister  
 die? along with her husband? and the king? By that time you'll be  
 dead. Better, you come with me and kill goddamn Idomeneus."

So spoke Deïphobus, whose speech ignited Aeneas'  
 battle-minded spirit; and together they went to seek out  
 Idomeneus, focused single-minded on taking him down.

Meanwhile, not the slightest thought of retreat had stirred the mind  
 of Idomeneus, as if he were some boy, and happy  
 with but one win, so takes excuse to leave to field : no, this man

gave no ground, just as a boar in the mountains puts all his trust  
 in his strength, and attacks the noisy stir of hunters that face  
 him, there in a lonely spot; and his back bristles up and down,  
 and his two eyes gleam with heat, and he scrapes his upper tusks,  
 his sharp-tipped cutters, all along his lower tusks, to make them  
 lethal-sharp as well : and he commits his strength to man and hound :  
 just so Idomeneus, who drove forward through the Trojans,  
 giving no ground; and while he killed this man and that he saw  
 magnificent Aeneas approach, and shouted out to his men  
 while thrusting and hacking, calling out for Ascalaphus τ'  
 Aphareus τε Deïpyrus τε Meriones τε  
 καὶ Antilochus, all master warriors, encouraging  
 them with winged words :

“This way, all of you, now! Aeneas comes!  
 We must take him together!”

So spoke Idomeneus. All of the Argives knew of fast-  
 moving Aeneas and his slaughtering powers, nourished by  
 his blossoming youth.

One word Idomeneus, half-grey under his bright helmet,  
 kept to himself :

“If only I were his age,” he thought, “then victory would be  
 mine alone.”

And as he thought this, all the warriors he'd summoned gathered  
 close, side by side, breathing one spirit of fury between them,  
 each and all leaning their shoulders into their shields, like a wall.



And opposite them Aeneas shouted out to his own men,  
 calling on Deiphobus, and Paris, and δῖος Agenor,  
 all foremost fighters and leaders of Trojans, along with him.

Then came a great shift in position, as their army followed  
 them, as the flock follows the ram from the field to the water,  
 and the herdsman smiles at heart; just so Aeneas smiled,  
 when he saw the Trojan army marching behind him.

So the two sides met over the body of Alcathous,  
 whom Zeus loved, yet lay dead regardless. They clashed in close combat  
 with spears and swords, and their bronze breast-plates beat with the fearful clash  
 of weaponry upon armour, leaving dents, as lust for war came over all.  
 Amid the mangling bodies moved the two best men, Aeneas  
 and Idomeneus, both peers of Ἄρης (as if that god cared to look).  
 Both warriors moved with one and the same hope : to slice open  
 the flesh of the other with the pitiless bronze. Aeneas  
 let fly, but Idomeneus, watching him all the while,  
 avoided the bronze spear, and the sharp tip stuck in the dirt,  
 and the long ash pole wobbled there, its leather hold in the middle  
 still warm with the anger of Aeneas, who snarled at his lost  
 chance. Then, with a laugh, Idomeneus ignored Aeneas  
 before everyone, and flung at Oenomaus, a perfect  
 cast, that struck him in the belly, shattering his convex breast-  
 plate; and the bronze continued into his body, and then all  
 his bowels spilled out onto the dust. Warrior Oenomaus  
 felt the sharp tip rip out of his body with a tug from mighty  
 Idomeneus, then fell and touched fresh earth for one last time.

And the shadow of the long death-bringing spear  
 shrouded the length of the dead man while Idomeneus  
 considered the final humiliation of tearing off

the rest of the armour; then, he thought best to get a move on, since spears, arrows, stones and all else were coming fast at him and around him. And the man he'd just vanquished had left him with a mixed feeling; amid the tireless battle he was annoyed to discover that his own body wasn't untiring, that his feet weren't as steadfast as in former times; as age has more power than power itself. Then he thought, 'If I had the youth of, say, Aeneas, I would charge into hand-to-hand fighting until the sun went down.' As it was, he only reluctantly withdrew from the centre of the battle, where he'd successfully defended against the pitiless bronze. And as Idomeneus withdrew, he found further displeasure with his feet, for they flew more slowly than in years before.

Then Deïphobus let fly at mighty Idomeneus, whose hate for him burned constant and forever. But he missed him again, the great Deïphobus (thus did Idomeneus rate his feet a little too harshly); but the spear-point ripped through Ascalaphus' shoulder, son of Enyalius; so the wounded man lost his own feet, and tumbled in the dust.

Now, Enyalius, father of the dying Ascalaphus, was a true grandson of terrible, man-slaughtering Ἄρης; and was himself a god, the god of soldiers, whose mother was dread Enyo, war-goddess hovering over the battlefield. Enyalius was honoured by the Argives with festivals and shrines and statues; yet the grandson of Ἄρης lay wounded regardless, and past saving. But word on Olympus travels

fast, and when excruciating Ἄρης , god insatiate  
 for spilled blood, learned of Ascalaphus's life-consuming  
 wound, the rage inside him swelled to dimensions inexpressible,  
 and he went to pounce on the havocked plain. Zeus Father, however,  
 stopped him, by trapping him in golden clouds; for no god now on  
 Olympus had permission to enter the war : such was the word  
 of Zeus.

So they fought over the writhing body of Ascalaphus  
 in hand-to-hand combat; and son of Priam Deïphobus  
 tore the helmet off the hapless Argive's head. Doing this, however,  
 brought a dagger blade into his arm, from the hand of fast-moving  
 Meriones. So Deïphobus dropped the flashing helmet,  
 which hit the ground with a clatter; and Meriones leapt at  
 Deïphobus, swooping in like a vulture with razor-sharp points;  
 but Polites, another son of Priam, sped sidewise by  
 the eyes of Meriones, taking Deïphobus with him  
 with a strong arm round his waist. Meriones did not pursue,  
 only laughed, as Deïphobus was taken from the battlefield;  
 Polites led him to a chariot and horses, which brought  
 him to the city; and he ground his teeth, and groaned in fury,  
 as the dark blood gushed from the wound in his killing arm.

All the others fought on, and the shrill voice of war filled the air  
 entire with hateful noise. Then Aeneas sprung on Aphareus,  
 Caletor's son, who was facing him, making it an effortless  
 throw of the spear from Aeneas straight through the air and throat  
 of Aphareus, poor Aphareus, whose head slacked to one side  
 as his body dropped under him, and his gleaming bronze helmet  
 and ornamented shield tumbled with him to earth; and death  
 took him away forever; while Antilochus, waiting

for the right moment, leaped at Thoön, who showed his back to him :  
 so Antilochus skilfully severed Thoön's spine, then yanked  
 the bloody spear back out as Thoön fell to earth with useless legs.  
 Thoön, amid the turmoil, stretched out his arms to his friends,  
 and called to them, but no one heard him, and in the battle-strife  
 he was trampled on; and died unrecognizable. But he wasn't  
 dead yet when Antilochus sprung over to rip his armour  
 off his feeble body, glancing terribly this way and that  
 as the Trojans closed in round him, their spear-points darting out  
 at him first here, now there; but Antilochus dodged them all,  
 and received not even a scratch from the flurry of flashing  
 death : for sneaky Earth-shaking Poseidon protected this son  
 of Nestor—which was busy work, for Antilochus was never  
 free of the enemy, but always fighting among them,  
 always in motion, at home in battle, whirling this way  
 and that way and leaving dead men now here, now there,  
 delivering ruin either with a skilled throw of the spear,  
 or with his bare hands.

But Antilochus was being watched—by Adamas, grandson  
 of Troy's Queen Hecuba. So as Antilochus raised his spear  
 to take aim, he felt the heaviness of a powerful strike  
 against his shield, that had seemingly come from out of nowhere;  
 but busy, sneaky, Earth-shaking Poseidon protected the son  
 of Nestor, by snapping the death-tip off the shaft and flinging  
 this now-worthless bronze off and away. But the long ashwood shaft  
 of the spear kept going : it rebounded up from the shield-face  
 and barely missed impaling Antilochus in the face,  
 as it flew past him and away. Surprised to be alive,  
 Antilochus looked to his shield, and saw that the spear  
 wood had snapped into two pieces. Half still stuck in his shield-face,

an inscrutable sign of the dark-haired lord Poseidon.

Adamas, meanwhile, also marvelling at Antilochus' luck, retreated into his band of men; but Meriones killed him with a cast of his spear, which pierced cruelly between groin and navel, the spot where Ἄρης delivers a most grisly pain to sorry mortals. So in that terrible spot the spear stuck fast, and the wounded Adamas writhed around, just as a mountain bull struggles at the bonds thrown round him by herdsmen, who then drag him away strenuously : just so Adamas struggled, but not for long : for hero Meriones came close, and pulled out the spear from his body; and death, the goddess of death, came closer still, and closed his eyelids.

Then in face-to-face fight Helenus drove through Deïpyrus' forehead with a shining Thracian sword, a heavy weapon that sliced through helmets as through a wheel of beeswax; then Helenus battered his head down to a mixture of bone and helmet fragments. And Deïpyrus' shadow went down to Hades, to abide in the darkness there.

Son of Atreus Menelaus, meanwhile, saw the ruin of the Achaean warrior, and answered by raising his spear against deadly Helenus and casting it : and the other raised his bow and sent an arrow from the string : and Helenus, son of Priam, struck Menelaus clean in the centre of his chest, but the arrow bounced off the heavy breast-plate there. The arrow bounced up and away like grain winnowing along a threshing floor, when a wind whistles in from afar, so marvellous was the shining bronze plate protecting Menelaus. And even as the bitter arrow

bounced away, his spear struck Helenus in the hand  
that held the bow, and fixed the hand of Helenus to the bow.  
So the wounded Helenus withdrew into his company  
of men, with his hand lowered by his side, and the long ashwood  
pole scraped a line in the dust behind him as he went away.  
The bronze was then extracted from both bow and hand  
by great-hearted Agenor, who applied a fleecy bandage  
to the wound, then bound up the arm in a sling of well-twisted  
wool that his attendant carried with him among his supplies.

Now Peisander, a Trojan soldier otherwise unknown  
to history, went straight at Menelaus, hoping to win  
for himself a name illustrious throughout the world of men;  
but he ended up charging through the open gates of Hades.  
So the hopeful Trojan came on, and war-wise Menelaus  
saw the spear rising in the aggressor's hand; and son of Atreus  
let fly, but missed; and Peisander lunged with his spear, and hammered  
the shield of illustrious Menelaus, but was unable  
to push the bronze-tip through to his body, for the shield caught it,  
and held it firmly in its many layers of ox-hide, while  
the ashen spear snapped into pieces and fell away. Peisander,  
however, continued advancing with great expectation  
of victory. But Menelaus drew his sword, his silver-  
studded beauty reflecting the battlefield's firelight,  
and sprang at Peisander; and while he saw the Trojan look  
to the shining sword, Peisander produced a battle-axe  
from under his valorous shield. (This weapon was a fine piece  
to inspect at leisure. Its wedged bronze head, sharp as an eagle's  
claws, was socketed by a handle of well-smoothed olive-wood.)  
So the two of them fell upon one another like raging beasts.  
Raising the axe-blade high, Peisander drove it down onto

Menelaus' helmet; but even as the keen blade touched the crest by the pocket where the horsehair flows from, Menelaus turned his head, and the axe-edge scraped down the helmet-side, leaving a long incision there. And Menelaus struck him on the head over the nose with his sword handle, then dropped the weapon and plunged his two thumbs into Peisander's two eyes, and he burst the eyeballs, and hot blood gushed over his hands; and whatever came out of the Trojan's head fell into the dust and was lost. Then Peisander, he too, fell into the dust, taking his great expectations with him into blind death. Then Menelaus kicked the man flat, and set down his foot solidly on his chest, and spoke :

"You evil bastard," he said, "that's what Trojans receive from Achaeans when we're treated with ugliness—I give you ugliness, you meagre arrogant bastard filth. Your city will fall to the power of Zeus, and all your people destroyed."

So spoke Menelaus, and kicked away the battle-axe, which was lost amid the tumult, just like Peisander's hopes. Then δῖος Menelaus absorbed himself in the front lines.

But the son of King Pylaemenes, fierce Harpalion, who had followed his beloved father to Ilium and combat, sprang at Menelaus; thereby losing hope of returning to his homeland. Taking his chance, he lunged with his spear at the hero's shining shield from close by, yet still failed to penetrate its defence. So he slipped back among his men in the hope of dodging fate, and looked this way and that in case any charging Argive warrior was coming for him, to cut through his flesh with the bronze. And an arrow flew in

from Meriones : and its bronze-tipped, triple-barbed arrow-head sank into Harpalion's right buttock. And the arrow went into his bladder—a precision shot that hit the mark between the bones of the pelvis. Menelaus had already killed his father some time before; and now Harpalion sat down on the earth just where he was, and breathed out the last of his life in the arms of his friends; and his dark blood gushed out onto the earth, and was drunk up by the dust. Just as an earthworm comes up out of the soil and into the light, so he lay there, about to go underground. And when he died, the great-souled Paphlagonians tended to his body. They lowered him into a chariot and brought him to Troy, feeling sorry for the dead man. But Harpalion would have no vengeance, for his father was gone.

And Paris, friend to the great-souled Paphlagonians, who had once kindly received him as a guest, filled with a slaughtering rage; and for their sake he strung a death-tipped arrow and shot it at the Argives. Now among the enormous number of Argives was a man called Euchenor. He was the son of the prophet Polyidus, who lived as a wealthy man in a palace in Corinth. So Euchenor had known exactly what was in store for him when he stepped onto his ship and departed for Troy and combat; for many times his old father, the good Polyidus, had spoken to his son of fate, which one has no chance of outrunning. His dear son Euchenor must either suffer illness and waste away to death at home in his halls, or go to Troy and be vanquished by the ships of the Argives. So Euchenor came to the Scamander plain, and there he died, when the arrow from Paris came to penetrate his throat, just under his jaw. Then his life left his body, but the long



arm of death wrapped it round, and drew it down under the earth,  
and brought his spirit into abominable endless night.

So the two armies fought deep-delv'd like twin fires joined  
as one monumental blaze, and its wild roaring increased;  
and Hector, beloved of Zeus, pushed forward through spear and sword,  
and smashed through the dense-packed lines of Achaean shield-bearers,  
and saw the precious ships ahead of him, there by the shore  
of the ancient sea, propped up on the sand where the salt water  
rushes up then retreats continuously. And Hector had no  
knowledge of his army's troubles on the left flank, as the Argives  
were rising in strength there again (and no one there would ever  
know if it were Poseidon Earthshaker favouring their power,  
or not); but Hector had no care at all but moving forward  
in his bronze armour, as the arrows flew in as a shower  
of death at him and the Trojans, as the precious black ships stood  
vulnerable in his sight—the ships of Ajax, and the ships  
of Protesilaus, the first man to fall in the long war,  
whose wife Laodamia thereafter mourned her whole life through.  
And just there, the Trojans were streaming over the collapsing  
wall, and the battle was at its most furious and raving.

And the arrows rushing in flew from the bright-shining bows  
of the Locrians, who shunned close fight, wearing no armour  
to protect them, having neither shield nor helmet; but they fought  
only with bows, and with well-twisted linen slings that sent stones  
flying, hoping to break up the closely-packed Trojan warriors  
and put them to flight. And there with the Locrians by the ships  
were the Boeotians καὶ Ionians καὶ noble Phthians  
τῆ the illustrious Epeians, all furiously keeping  
Hector and his men from pressing forward; none of these peoples,

however, stopped δῖος Hector, who came on like a flame of fire;  
 and the Athenians, too, were pushing back, hoping to save  
 their ships. And in the midst of the fray were the two Ajaxes :  
 as quick-moving Ajax, son of Oileus, would never not fight  
 by Telamon Ajax's side, not for a moment; but just  
 as two oxen yoked side by side work the well-wood-workéd plough  
 through the deep-soiled field, and the sweat gushes from the base  
 of their horns as the pair alone labour within the fences,  
 cutting the furrow to the limits of the field; even so  
 did the two Ajaxes fight vigorously side by side  
 and gave no ground. Even so, Hector continued his onslaught,  
 struggling through the mass of shields butting him on all sides  
 and the spear points flitting by; and his fellow warrior there  
 with him, the trusted Polydamas, called out to him, saying :

"Hector! Hear this one word! Ahead there's a warrior  
 who's going to stand up at some point and fight!"

And Hector responded :

"Show him to me."

And he moved on, δῖος Hector, leaving Polydamas  
 to hold their position just there; but Hector kept advancing;  
 and the great-hearted Trojans came streaming into the camp  
 over the collapsed parts of the Wall; but he saw his warriors  
 exhausted from their struggle to get to this favourable  
 position, and many of them, now inside the camp, dawdled  
 with their arms and armour in scattered groups, having fallen back  
 from battle, though the ships lay before them, just beyond  
 the mighty press of Achaeans. And for the first time Hector

wondered if God had indeed willed him victory; or perhaps he would never return to the city again. Then he heard trusted Polydamas crying out behind him to marshal the forces, both Trojan and allies; and they came to Panthous' son Polydamas; and the Trojans began to close ranks.

So Hector with redoubled strength hacked his way up to the sterns of the ships, looking around him for his best warriors—Helenus and Adamas and Deïphobus and Asius among them—but the only ones around him now were bloody with wounds; and some were falling, there by the sterns of the ships, destroyed by Argive hands, as the spears and arrows and stones came flying in, and the Argive foot-forces sprung at them in flashing bronze armour. Then Hector saw Alexandros by the Wall on the left, hateful husband to Helen, withdrawn from the fight. So Hector stormed up to his brother, and spoke :

“Hateful Paris! Where is Deïphobus? And Helenus?  
And Adamas? And Asius? And Othryoneus?  
We can kill them off now, or be killed. Which is it?”

And Alexandros responded :

“Dear brother, all those you ask of are dead. Well, Deïphobus and Helenus live, but are wounded, and away from the fight. Each was wounded in the arm, curiously. And why ‘hateful’? I am not at fault for all this. But our mother gave birth to no cowards, so lead me in any direction you wish, according to the command of your heart. We’ll fight as we can, but no greater, however eager the man, for we are very tired.”

Thus spoke Alexandros. And Hector indeed roused the men  
 with a battle-cry to fight, and the Trojan warriors came  
 with him—Cebriones καὶ Polydamas καὶ Phalces καὶ  
 Orthaeus τε καὶ godlike Polyphetes—and they went  
 to where the combat and noise were greatest. They came on  
 just as vexatious winds join as a whirlwind beneath Father  
 Zeus’ thunder, and the divine storm mixes with the salt sea,  
 and the loud-roaring waters bubble and boil with waves  
 crested with foam; one after another; so the Trojans  
 in close order, glittering in bronze, followed behind  
 their leaders toward the Achaeans and the black ships.

Hector led the way, Priam’ son, man-destroying peer of Ἴφης .  
 He held before him his heavy shield, a thick-packed compression  
 of dry ox-hides, with much bronze welded on; and his eyes looked out  
 from his helmet shining in the sun.

And Ajax son of Telamon came before him,  
 and stood his ground. And the warriors around them  
 slowed their fighting to watch. And Ajax spoke :

“Most mighty Trojan, come to me. I say that whatever curse  
 Zeus put on us Achaeans is now gone. If you step closer  
 you’ll walk into a plague. And you’ll have no hands left  
 to fight a defence. These hands you see will soon bring your city  
 down to nothing. As for you, you’re going home, while the city  
 still stands, but you’ll be carried home dead over the dusty plain.”

Thus spoke Ajax, and all the Argives behind him cheered.

And δῖος Hector answered him :

“Ajax, what gibberish you speak. Come to me, and you shall fall.  
My spear shall tear your lily-like body for the dogs and birds  
to feast on, while you lay unburied by your burning black ships.”

Thus spoke Hector, and stepped forward, and the Trojans behind him  
roared a mighty battle-cry, and the Achaeans opposite them  
joined to raise the cry up resounding through the sky to the light  
of the sun and Zeus.

End of

Book XIII